



THE SHEEP TRACK

AN ASPECT OF LONDON SOCIETY

By NESTA H. WEBSTER

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то М А R Y

"Look to it, that thou do nothing like a sheep, or thus hath the man perished."—EPICTETUS.

".... It is not in this, as in other voyages, where the highway brings us to our destination.... on the contrary, the beaten track is here the most dangerous.... Let us not, therefore, follow like sheep, but rather govern ourselves by reason than by other men's fashions."—SENECA.

CHAPTER I.

THE grey-haired man in the Tyrolean hat and the young man at his side—obviously a soldier—were beginning to despair of ever reaching their destination as the jingling little "voiture de place" in which they were seated, leaving the gay Promenade des Anglais behind it, continued its way merrily down a deserted bit of sea front on the road to Cannes. The sound of the band playing on the pier died away in the distance and the silence was broken only by the click of the horses' feet on the dusty road and the ripple of the tideless sea on the soft white sand of the beach.

"It is evident that Mr. Fayne likes solitude!" said the elder man, looking round him with a smile as if in doubt of finding any villa so far from the haunts of men. "Are you sure," he called out to the *cocher*, "that you know the way to the Villa Bel Riposo?"

"Eh! bien sûr!" the light hearted "niçois" responded with a gleam of white teeth as he twisted his body round on the box the better to enjoy a confidential chat with his fare. "Often have I driven Monsieur Bel Riposo and the little demoiselle to the Villa or again into the country—to Cap Martin, La Turbie"—and he indicated the directions with a wave of his brown hand.

It was evident that he was ready to embark on the entire family history of the Monsieur whom, after the manner of the Riviera cabmen, he designated by the name of his abode.

"Monsieur Bel Riposo," he went on, "is a savant, a solitaire. He cares nothing for the world of Nice. All the years that he has lived here never have I seen him at the Café, on the Promenade, before the orchestra. The other English they come here to be

amused, Monsieur Bel Riposo-no!" and the cocher executed a frowning shake of the head, intended apparently to represent the eccentric Monsieur's attitude towards the vanities of the world. With a sigh he whipped up his nimble little horses. "Ohé-! For the little demoiselle, his daughter, who lives with him all alone, it is not gay-decidedly it is not

gav!"

The thought seemed to oppress his sympathetic pleasure-loving soul, and he spoke no more until with a hearty "Nous voici!" he drew up before a low iron gateway over which papery pink roses fell in showers. A small marble tablet set in the wall at the side bore the words: "Villa Bel Riposo." Jumping lightly from the box, the cocher stepped up to the gate-post and, pulling away a trailing branch of mesembryanthemum, disclosed the handle of a bell which he pulled vigorously. A faint tinkle in the distance rewarded his effort.

"Il ne vient pas beaucoup de monde ici!" he said

with a shrug at the rusty wire.

The two men descended from the carriage and stood before the gateway.

"Ring again, Boris!" said the elder man.

A more violent pull on the bell handle resulted this time in a louder tinkle but also in the cracking wrench of a breaking wire at the top of the gate post.
"Now you have broken the bell!" said the elder

man with a laugh, "so if no one comes we shall be

obliged to walk back into Nice!"

But at that moment a step sounded on the pebble pathway that led up to the house and the key of the gate grated in the lock. As it swung open a fairhaired German-Swiss manservant with the high cheek bones of his race stood before them.

He gazed at the grey-haired man with a look of infantile innocence in his blue eyes whilst, beneath an enormous wisp-like moustache his mouth smiled widely, disclosing large far apart teeth.
"Brière d'entrer!" he remarked in careful and

execrable French, holding the gate hospitably wide.

"It is well, then!" said the grey-haired man turning to his companion and speaking in a language unknown to the maitre d'hôtel. "I will go in and see Mr. Fayne alone." And he hurried forward through the gate, leaving the younger man to walk

slowly away along the deserted boulevard.

Once inside the garden with its secluding balustrade of dilapidated stucco overgrown with creepers, the villa in its acre of garden was apparent. It was a primitive little house, built in old-fashioned Italian style, and, standing as it did, on the very outskirts of the gay town, had remained a relic of the days when "Nizza la Bella" still lay on the Italian side of the frontier. The plaster walls bore ghostly shadows of once florid frescoes beneath the eaves and around the loggia on the first floor which formed an outdoor sitting-room.

Sigismund, the still smiling maitre d'hôtel, led the way into the narrow tiled hall. Then he turned with

some hesitation to the stranger.

"Bardon! But it is about some books that you have called, Monsieur?"

"About some books?"

The stranger looked bewildered. "Yes, in a sense that is the case! I understood that Mr. Fayne expects me—" he added with a shade of impatience in his

pleasant voice.

"Oh yes, surely!" and the smile on Sigismund's face widened. "But it is thus—Monsieur has gone out for a walk—with a professeur who arrived unexpectedly from Geneva—and before leaving he told me that Monsieur Gredin would call about this hour with regard to the re-binding of Monsieur's books on Babylon."

"Ah, yes!" The grey-haired man's face was

suddenly creased into a hundred lines of mirth.

And Sigismund, encouraged by his smiling countenance and surer now than ever of his ground, continued blandly:

"Monsieur said I was to be sure not to let Monsieur Gredin go without seeing him—that I was to ask him to await Monsieur's return," and Sigismund politely motioned him to seat himself on a wooden high-backed chair that stood against the wall of the front hall.

The stranger's smile grew appreciably at this invitation. It was evident that the whole incident appealed irresistibly to some underlying vein of humour which expressed itself all over his simple kindly face.

"I am sure Monsieur will not be long!" Sigismund added soothingly, as he prepared to disappear through the door leading to the back premises, "for he told me particularly that he was expecting you."

The visitor seemed delighted. His eyes gleamed as he removed his green hat and sat down on the chair to wait.

Sigismund vanished, and for quite ten minutes the stranger sat and waited in silence. And then just as his back was beginning to suffer from the hard contact of the chair, and his feet from the chilly touch of the tiled floor, his attention was diverted by a wild rush of sound from an upper region. A hurricane was apparently making its way along a passage overhead but as it came nearer could be distinguished as a succession of light footsteps that, after rushing along the level for some distance, began nimbly to descend the stairs. Suddenly with a run a slim figure in a close-fitting white jersey and dark blue knickers, with the neatest of legs and ankles encased in black silk stockings and patent leather pumps, took the last six steps of the staircase at a jump and landed without a sound on the mat at the bottom. The whole thing was so perfectly done that the stranger in the hall could not refrain from rising to his feet and clapping his hands.

"Brava!" he exclaimed delightedly confronting the slim girl of fifteen who stood at the foot of the stairs in some confusion. "Bonsoir, Monsieur," she said, growing rather

pink, "I did not know anyone was here."

But at this moment the door into the back premises opened and Sigismund came again into the hall—on tiptoe, as was his custom when he desired to be specially deferential. Approaching the girl mysteriously he explained to her in a loud whisper the reason of the stranger's presence. Monsieur was expecting Monsieur Gredin of the librairie to call about re-binding his books on Babylon and had given Sigismund strict injunctions that he was not to be allowed to depart till Monsieur himself returned. But at this point the girl quickly interrupted him.

"I am sure you have made a mistake, Sigismund. This gentleman is not Monsieur Gredin." And turn-

ing to the stranger she enquired gently:

Pardon, monsieur, but you are not a book-binder,

are you?"

The stranger's smile now broke out frankly into a laugh. He answered in English, "No, alas! mademoiselle, I am not a book-binder. Still it is true that I called, as your excellent maitre d'hôtel suggested about some books on Babylon. I happened to be travelling there some years ago and became interested in the history of this ancient civilization. On speaking of the matter to my old friend, Lady Grundisburgh—"he paused enquiringly. The girl nodded.

"Yes, papa's oldest friend."

"So I understood. Lady Grundisburgh then told me of your father's learning, saying that as one of the greatest living authorities on Assyria he would perhaps advise me with regard to literature on the subject. She wrote, I believe, arranging for an interview, and I understood that Mr. Fayne had replied stating he would be at home this afternoon and would be kind enough to show me his library."

The girl shook her head. "Papa didn't tell me, and I'm afraid he must have forgotten about it. He nearly always does forget his engagements! Fortunately he has very few. And this afternoon Professor

Lenotre arrived quite unexpectedly from Geneva and began to talk to Papa about the Roman remains in this neighbourhood and they walked off together to visit the amphitheatre. That was two hours ago. They ought to be back at any moment now. Will you come up to the library and wait?"

"Certainly, if you will stop and talk to me."

"Then we must introduce ourselves. I am Marica Fayne—and you——?"

"That you shall guess!" said the stranger, with a

smile.

They were walking upstairs now, and on the first floor the door of a pleasant room stood open to the landing.

"Is this the library?" asked the visitor with an

interested glance.

"No, that is my schoolroom."
"May we not see that?"

"Oh, certainly. But it is very untidy!"

It was quite true. It was untidy. Books and papers littered the table and were piled indiscriminately in every corner. But the room itself was charming. The walls were covered with a rough paper of the warm grey artists know as neutral tint and served as an admirable background for the engravings of Greek sculpture which formed the only decoration. Over the mantel-piece there hung an immense drawing of a statue in the Vatican—the nude figure of a wounded gladiator.

It was a room that suggested the study of a careless undergraduate rather than a young girl's schoolroom—no photographs or ornaments broke the severity which its business-like disorder did nothing to dispel.

The visitor looked round with a smile, and his glance falling on a foil that lav across an open lexicon on the table, he picked it up and remarked:

"So you do fencing too?"

"Oh yes." Suddenly glancing down at her neat nether garments she added apologetically, "That reminds me that I have not yet changed my fencing

ess. I have only just finished my lesson."
"But it is charming!" said the stranger politely, seating himself in the window seat and contemplating Marica with evident amusement as she perched on the Yet his amusement was arm of a chair opposite him.

admiring rather than derisive.

The girl certainly was very pretty in a curious, unobvious way. She had none of the ungainly beauty of the embryo belle but rather the subtle charm that grows with nearness. At the first glance, seen from the other end of the hall, she had appeared to the stranger a slim boyish creature charming only with the spring and vitality of youth. Now as he saw her nearer he noticed the extraordinary fineness of her skin, the clearness of her grey eyes, the perfect moulding of her little retroussé nose. Over a forehead of almost startling intelligence, brown hair fell softly with brilliant coppery lights upon its ripples. And the spirit of mirth that underlay the stranger's worn features found an answering gleam in the small face before him.

She looked across and met the twinkle in his eve.

"And still I do not know who you are!"

She spoke English without a foreign accent but with the syncopated distinctness of one accustomed to the enunciation of Latin tongues.

"No," he answered lightly, "you do not even

know my nationality!"

She looked at him intently for a moment.

"I think you are from Eastern Europe-perhaps from Sylvania," she said slowly.

"Quite right. How did you guess it?"

"We spent a summer once in Sylvania. Papa went to visit the Barovna University. Perhaps you belong to it?" she added with a sudden inspiration.

"Do I seem like a professor?"

"No, but few people visit Papa who are not professors or something of the kind." She continued to look at him calmly with the steady gaze of quite unselfconscious youth. "But no, you do not look

like a professor," she said at last.

"I do not look clever enough—hein? Then since you have decided that I am neither a professor or a bookbinder, I wonder what you think I am?"

As she paused, he continued to look at her with the twinkle growing in his eye. It was evident, he was thinking to himself, this child was quite as simple as she appeared. To anyone so unsophisticated, of what avail to make mysteries?

"I think you are a soldier," Marica said finally in

answer to his smiling enquiry.

"There you are right, for I have the command of no less than three regiments. But I am also incidentally—a king."

"A king?" she repeated bewildered.
"The King of Sylvania," he said simply.

Marica stared at him for a moment incredulously. Then her face lit up with a surprised delight which he recognised at once as totally distinct from the awed amazement of the snob who finds he has been conversing with royalty unawares. There is a picturesqueness about being a royal personage that appeals to the imaginative, however simple-minded. Even a child sees the romance of a "fairy prince" that a mere "fairy gentleman" would fail to evoke. And Marica continued to look at the King of Sylvania with all the eager delight of a child who believes it has at last really encountered a fairy.

Then she remarked abruptly:

"And all this time I ought to have been calling you "Your Majesty!"

"That is of no consequence," he said courteously. "I am afraid you must think us very odd people.

We have given you a strange reception!"

That of course he could not deny. It was the oddest reception he had ever met with in his life, really so funny that his whole face broke out again into laughing lines at the recollection of it. He thought of his admittance by the cautious Sigismund,

the ten minutes passed on the hard oak chair in the hall, then the boisterous entry of the pretty "backfisch' who was now entertaining him so charmingly in the schoolroom whilst his host had gone out for a walk and forgotten all about him. And there came to his mind in contrast the remembrance of receptions he had lately received elsewhere on the Riviera. He saw himself arriving at the Cannes Golf Club with the crowd of hungry golfers standing exhausted and unfed until he took his seat next to the Grand Duke who arrived half an hour late at the head of the table. He saw in memory the much rehearsed curtseys of the ladies from Liverpool and Chicago who through arduous manoeuvring had secured the privilege of an introduction, and heard again their nervously ecstatic prattle punctuated throughout with "Sirs" each time they paused for breath.

Yes, certainly this reception was strange and—

refreshing.

The King of Sylvania like many really important people was extremely simple. The pomp and circumstance of his life often bored him excessively and he loved nothing so much as to get away from it all and be treated as an ordinary human being. It was true he had not enjoyed his ten minutes on the hard chair in the hall, but he was now quite happy, for he loved children with all the illusioned fervour of a childless man. The really great—those born great, that is to say-just like the very humble have often a simplicity to which the intervening classes seldom attain. Viceroy may paralyse a stranger with his importance -a king or a carpenter will set him immediately at his Perhaps it is because both king and carpenter have had their social path made so plain to them that the souls of neither have been vexed with the complications which make life so elaborate and harassing a matter to the people between them in the social scale.

"Please do not feel distressed on my account," the

King said, smiling at Marica.

"But we must seem to you so extraordinary, so

eccentric! So we are no doubt. Papa, you see, will know nobody, go nowhere."

"You have lived here long in this way?"

"For ten years."

"But you do not stay here in the summer?"

"No. Even the bees," she added with a laugh, "go away in summer to the mountains. We do the same."

"And where do you go?"

"To different places. Thorenc, the Black Forest, the Tyrol, any place where Papa can make sure of being alone."

"Then you have no friends of your own age? No

companions?"

"No," she said with a sad smile, and then added gaily, "but still I have James and Charlotte!"
"And who are they?"

For answer she sprang up and ran to a rough wooden box in the corner of the room. "See, your Majesty!"

He rose and looked in.

On a carpet of grass at the bottom of the box two fat green frogs sat contentedly.

"Aren't they darlings?" said Marica fondly.

He smiled. "Do you really like them?"

"I love them. They have such beautiful expressions-especially after a meal. Besides they remind me—", she stopped abruptly.

"Of what do they remind you?" he asked amused.

She laughed. "When one is much alone one gets into the way of thinking aloud. What I was going to say would seem to you absurd. They remind me of the aunt and uncle after whom they are named. That is all."

"I am sure the uncle and aunt would be highly flattered. Are they aware of the honour?"

"Oh no-Your Majesty. You see they were very angry about—the frog episode——" Marica's voice grew tremulous with suppressed laughter.

"I am sure it was very funny, tell me about it!" said the King.

"Well, Your Majesty-"

"Don't bother about my Majesty for the moment.

Go straight on."

"He was angry?"

Marica looked relieved. "Then what happened was this. A great many years ago, when I was only seven years old, I was sent to stay with Aunt Charlotte and Uncle James in Scotland. That was just after we came to live at Nice. Uncle James was the Governor of Jamaica—Sir James Plumpton—and he was Scotch and very religious. There was quite a nice boy called Billy, about my own age, staying in the house, and we had great fun except on Sundays. On Sundays there was really nothing one might do. We mightn't even have our baths in the morning. And of course we might play no games except Sunday ones—Scripture puzzles and that sort of thing. Papa had never taught me anything about the Bible so of course that shocked them at once. On the second Sunday—a wet day—Billy and I couldn't bear it any more and we asked if we might build a house with bricks. But Uncle James said no, not unless we built a house out of the Bible. We couldn't think of one at first and then Aunt Charlotte brightly suggested Rahab's house. We had heard all about it in the lesson at Church the Sunday before. So Billy and I set to work to build Rahab's house. It was really quite amusing. We made a flat roof with the lid of a box. And we found a bit of red wool which Aunt Charlotte was using to knit comforters for Deep Sea Fishermen to hang out of the window. And then we ran out into the garden and collected some grass for the spies to hide in. We had just finished when suddenly two brown frogs jumped out from under a leaf! Of course the very thing! the spies themselves! So we carried them in and tied the red wool round their waists, and I was Rahab letting them up and down from the roof when Uncle James came in!"

"Furious! We were sent to bed immediately. Aunt Charlotte was horrified. She said we had made a joke of sacred people. Billy said it hadn't struck him that Rahab was a particularly sacred person but that only seemed to make Uncle James all the angrier. And Aunt Charlotte said everyone mentioned in the Bible was sacred. We were in fearful disgrace and Aunt Charlotte never forgave us. It was terrible! And of course since then frogs have always made me think of her and Uncle James."

She took Charlotte up gently and held her out on the small flat palm of her hand for the King's inspection. The King appeared delighted, and for several moments went on laughing quietly to himself.

And just then the door opened and a tall thin man of about fifty wandered dreamily into the room.

CHAPTER II.

HASTILY replacing Charlotte on her bed of hay Marica turned to her father.

"Papa," she said going towards him, "you had

forgotten you were expecting a visitor?"

Mr. Fayne looked wonderingly at his daughter and then at the still smiling guest, with the expression of a lost child as he advanced and held out his hand uncomprehendingly.

"But, Papa," interposed Marica, "this is the King of Sylvania to whom you had promised to show

your library this afternoon!"

Mr. Favne's hand fell to his side and he stood gazing at the King in horrified bewilderment. He was genuinely overwhelmed at the embarrassing nature of the situation. Edward Fayne's apartness from his fellow men held nothing of the pose adopted by the would-be artist of the day who, believing absent-mindedness to be a mark of genius deliberately leaves invitations unanswered and revels in his reputation for vagueness. Mr. Fayne had no intention of being vague. He did not realize he was vague. When Lady Grundisburgh's note reached him, announcing the visit of the King of Sylvania, he had answered it at once, expressing in small, classical handwriting and perfect English the pleasure he would have in showing the travelling monarch his books on Babylon. And then, when the time came Professor Lenotre had suddenly arrived with a stirring account of recent excavations; the conversation had drifted to the Roman remains on the Riviera: still talking they wandered together in the direction of the amphitheatre; there, sitting on the crumbling stone overlooking the arena they had become absorbed in contemplation of the past and so it had happened.

Mr. Fayne's distress was genuine and acute. He

had a horror of discourtesy.

With the savoir faire that is the peculiar heritage of the man with generations of courtly ancestors, he rose to the exigencies of the situation and dispelling the brief moment of confusion, bowed and said:

"I must ask your forgiveness, sir, I cannot find

words to express my regret at the occurrence."

"Pray do not apologise further, Mr. Fayne," said the King genially. "We are all liable to lapses of memory."

Mr. Fayne looked gratefully towards him.

"Yes, that is it. It is better, sir, to be frank about it, and I see Marica has already told you the truth. I had forgotten that it was to-day you had signified your kind intention of paying me a visit. I must apologise to you, sir, profoundly."

"Please don't think of it again! So far I have

"Please don't think of it again! So far I have enjoyed my visit immensely. Your little daughter has been entertaining me delightfully. And now perhaps you will allow me to visit your library?"

"I shall be delighted."

As the two men moved towards the door the King

held out his hand to Marica with a smile.

"Goodbye, Marica. You must come to tea with the Queen one day and tell her the story of Rahab and the frogs."

Marica could hear him laugh again softly as the

door closed behind him.

Mr. Fayne led the way to his library, a long low room he had built out at the back of the little villa to contain his collection of Eastern literature.

Offering his guest a chair Mr. Fayne took up his stand on the hearthrug and in answer to the King's enquiries was soon immersed in a discourse on ancient civilizations.

As he spoke, his guest had leisure to observe the savant's remarkable personality. He suggested in no outward way the fossilized archæologist of fiction. His fresh colouring and crisply waving brown hair

represented the ideal of the hygienist. Yet in reality his splendid physique, lean and wiry, proclaimed his triumph over the maxims of the health faddists. All his life he had spent the greater part of his waking hours stooping over books, had taken only occasional exercise, and then of a violent and spasmodic description, and had never worried about hygiene or diet. He liked warm rooms, hot baths, and ate anything that was put before him, yet he glowed with the health and vitality which modern prophets of hygiene would have us believe to be only the reward of the cold tub, the open window and the scientific appreciation of food values.

The King of Sylvania sat and watched him with interest. His host's command of language was unique, as with eyes fixed remotely upon the cornice he spoke of kings long dead, of cities buried centuries ago beneath the sand of deserts. With swift strokes of speech he seemed to paint scenes from the dim past on the canvas of the mind, and the grey-haired king sitting in his chair felt his own brief spell of power dwindle into nothingness beside the endless æons; he saw before him the dusty scrolls of Time unfurled and watched the rising of dynasties in the morning of the world.

An hour passed unheeded whilst Mr. Fayne discoursed, taking down now and again immense volumes from the library shelves the better to illustrate his meaning. At last the King rose to his feet with a smile.

"I have passed a delightful afternoon," he said, holding out his hand, "not the least part being my half hour with Marica."

Mr. Fayne smiled whimsically. "I am delighted, sir, that you think she does my system credit."

"Your system? It has certainly been successful

whatever it is!"

"You think so, sir? I must admit I also find the result satisfactory. Marica is a charming child with a mind like a garden. And every seed has been sown

with care!" Mr. Fayne drew himself up and looked his guest proudly in the eye. "That child has never read a novel!"

"So I should imagine. She is certainly most

ingenuous."

"I hope so. I hope so most sincerely."

"But tell me what has been your system?" the King asked, interested in this curious dreamer and his daughter. They were both quite unlike any people he had ever met before. "Pray tell me what is your

'system,' Mr. Fayne."

"Beauty!" The answer came emphatically and the word rang out like a pistol shot. "Beauty! In that one word my system is contained." He assumed a rhetorical attitude, standing on the hearthrug with his back to the fire. "My theory, sir, is simply this: Teach a young girl to fix her thoughts on the beautiful and she will never go far wrong. From her earliest infancy let this one principle dominate her life. Give her beautiful picture books, beautiful toys, beautiful songs! Banish from her nursery everything that is ugly or grotesque—nigger dolls, golly wogs, atrociously decorated dolls' houses, Noah's arks with impossible animals—all the infantile entourage that vitiates for life the budding mind of a child."

The King listened rather blankly. He was a simple

The King listened rather blankly. He was a simple person and not particularly interested in psychology. He stemmed the flow of Mr. Fayne's eloquence by

bringing the conversation back to Marica.

"And so all these things have been kept from

Marica?"

"All, sir. From the time Marica was a baby of two and was given her first picture book she has never looked at modern fiction. Her brain was never stuffed with foolish fairy stories, or the twaddle of magazines."

"And what has she read then?"

"These, sir!" and with a wave of his hand Mr. Fayne indicated the book-lined walls of the library. "She has been allowed the run of all that this room

contains. All the classics are at her disposal and she loves them with a fervour that might have been wasted on Grimm or Marie Edgeworth!"

The King smiled. The rhetoric of this eccentric and quite attractive savant amused him. But it was growing late, and doubtless his equerry was catching

a chill at the gate.

He rose to go. Mr. Fayne escorted him through the hall, the scene of Sigismund's late blunder. Sigismund, now aware of his mistake, was waiting there, and as the King passed he approached him and with a nervous smile murmured an apology.

"Che vous demande bardon, monsieur le roi-c'est

a dire, fotre machesté—che ne savais bas---'

But the King checked him with a laughing gesture. Sigismund was as delightfully unsophisticated as the rest of this curious household.

"It matters not," he answered heartily in German which immediately set Sigismund at his ease and widened the smile across his honest face. It was evident that though he regretted his error he was far

from realising its enormity.

The brief twilight of a Riviera evening had passed abruptly into dark, as the King, accompanied by Mr. Fayne and Sigismund, joined his equerry who was pacing up and down outside the little iron gate. He shook hands warmly with his host, expressed his enjoyment of a delightful visit and walked away with the equerry to whom he recounted his adventure. Mr. Fayne turned back to the house with a sigh of relief to resume his interrupted treatise on the Seleucidae, and Sigismund, now restored to his usual complacency, sought the kitchen where Teresa, the Italian cook, had prepared, with large-minded impartiality, a supper to suit his Swiss palate.

Nothing of so little moment as the visit of a stray King could seriously upset the even tenor of the Villa

Bel Riposo.

CHAPTER III.

EDWARD Fayne's aloofness from the human race was one of those hereditary instincts which descend, in some families, to their remotest generations.

Ever since Alured de Fayne, bored with life at the Court of Edward I, had retired to his country home to bury himself in his books, his descendants had lived on in Westshire unknown to history, yet infinitely content to while their lives away in art and learning, in sober sport and the feudal philanthropy

that Socialism had not yet sought to destroy.

The curse of the Faynes in no way affected their They were, indeed, entirely unaware peace of mind. that it existed. For the curse consisted of no mummied head in a mouldering chest or imprecation written on yellow parchment by some indignant friar in the Middle Ages, but in a peculiarity of temperament that throughout their history had barred their path to success. They were constitutionally unable to make a mark in the world. If a Fayne became a soldier, he died obscurely fighting on the eve of a victory whilst his fortunate companions home as popular heroes; if a Fayne wrote a book it was sure to be too abstruse for almost anyone to read Each Fayne in turn was born into the world with a missing organ—the organ which is of all others the most potent aid to greatness—an eye for the main Of policy, self-advertisement, of turning their intellects to advantage they had not the remotest So-called "clever families" often consist merely of people shrewd enough to adopt a system of mental "intensive culture," by which the indifferent soil of their brains is utilized to the full extent and made to bear crop after crop of marketable produce. The Faynes were constituted on exactly opposite principles. On the fertile acres of intellect bestowed on them by Nature they cultivated only the things that appealed to them, whilst on the spaces that lay fallow and untilled they might have sown the seeds of wealth and fame.

This indifference to material consideration had culminated in the father of Edward Fayne—the "de" had long since been dropped as a useless affectation—and brought about the final undoing of the family. The fatal idea occurred to Richard Fayne of doing a service to his country by inaugurating a scheme for cutting a canal from Westshire to the sea. The neighbouring magnates with an hereditary belief in the Fayne intellect immediately fell in with the idea and subscribed largely towards the enterprise.

An unlimited liability company was formed and the work began. But the Westshire canal turned out a Panama in miniature, its magnitude proved far greater than the Company had realized, and it was only half completed when they were brought face to face with the frightful discovery that the funds had given out. The canal remained useless and unfinished and the money put into it was irretrievably gone. was at this juncture that Richard Fayne performed his crowning act of Quixotism. Summoning his neighbours and allies together he informed them that he held himself alone responsible for the failure of the scheme-it was he who had thought it out, he who had put it into action. They had lent their money through their confidence in his judgment. Therefore since his judgment had been at fault he was to blame and he alone for the ruin of their fortunes. How could he look on at their retrenchments knowing himself to be the cause of them? Impossible! Therefore, in spite of all their protestations he sold his estates, paid back the money subscribed in full and retired in comparative poverty to end his days in Brighton.

Richard died, leaving four children, the eldest Edward, and his three sisters, two of whom inherited the Fayne intellect whilst the eldest, Charlotte, proved a hark back to a certain great-grandmother and solved the problem of existence with crochet-work and the inspired pages of Mrs. Beeton. Consequently Charlotte married well, whilst Louisa and Harriet remained

erudite and mildly contented spinsters.

Edward, who was fourteen when the downfall of the family took place, was immediately sent abroad to finish his education at less expense in Stuttgart and Geneva. As a matter of fact his tastes were quite un-English, and he was not sorry to exchange the purely physical outlook on life of an English public school for the mental activity of foreign universities. He soon became entirely cosmopolitan, and the memory of Westshire and its associations faded

gradually from his mind.

At twenty-one he returned to England to find that another change had taken place in the family fortunes. The Westshire Canal had been bought up by a Company who had suddenly realized all the possibilities of the scheme which in the dilettante hands of Richard Favne were doomed to failure, but now taken in a firm commercial grasp promised to be highly lucrative. The Faynes were offered a large sum of money for the interest they still retained in the scheme. And at that moment some mines in which Richard Fayne had invested many years before suddenly struck ore and began to pay a large dividend. Whereupon Mrs. Fayne and her daughters bade farewell to the stuccoed strand of Brighton and took up their abode in a large solid "mansion" in Queen's Gate.

Edward, who had returned from abroad loaded with classical honours, pursued his studious way in London and at first resisted all attempts to take him into society. He never noticed the existence of any woman. Charlotte, who had planned that he should marry her friend, the clever and beautiful Lady Caroline Dunsfold, found her scheme abortive. If she invited Lady Caroline to the house to meet him,

Edward was sure to forget all about it and be out when she arrived. And when one day they met by accident, Edward, on being appealed to for his opinion, carelessly pronounced her "hall-marked" and seemed to take no further interest in the subject. But Lord Burscough, Lady Caroline's father, the most influential Conservative peer of his day, hearing a speech of Edward's at the Royal Society, was so impressed by his brilliant oratory that he invited him to stay at his country house. Edward went. Evervone was charmed with him. Great men were heard to remark that if he chose to go in for politics a brilliant career awaited him. As Lord Burscough's son-in-law, his future would be assured. And then just as the tide in his affairs was leading on to fortune, he spoilt everything by marrying, not Lady Caroline, but Nora O'Donagh, a wild and lovely girl of eighteen from the West of Ireland without money, influence or the savoir faire which was so necessary to atone for Edward's own hereditary vagueness. The curse of the Faynes held. From that day Edward's prospects declined. Two years later, when Marica was only a few months old, the culminating fatality occurred. Edward and his wife, refusing all invitations to country houses at Easter-for the young couple still remained popular in society—started out for a cruise round the coast of Scotland in the "Sea Urchin," a twenty-ton yacht lent them by a friend. It was at this moment that Fate elected to deal her final blow to the career of Edward Fayne. No one ever knew exactly what occurred-only a jumbled medley of disjointed facts elicited with some difficulty from the skipper's mate. A foggy evening, a drunken skipper, a large trawler advancing full steam ahead, Mr. Fayne lying on his back in the bows saying poetry "in a foreign language," Mrs. Fayne unable to rouse him to the sense of danger. After the collision only Edward Fayne and the skipper's mate were brought ashore half drowned to tell the tale. Needless to say, Edward told nothing. It had all happened so quickly

that it had left only a confused memory of horror and fear which he sought to banish from his mind as soon as possible. His whole nature, in its sensitive clinging to the beauty of life shrank from suffering in any form. He had always fled the proximity of illness, and mental suffering was equally abhorrent to him, it disturbed his serenity, and nothing must be allowed This horrible tragedy did not bear to do that. thinking about—it must be thrust away immediately out of sight. For Edward Fayne possessed the power only acquired by a lifetime of mental control, of shutting off unwelcome thoughts as if behind burglarproof steel doors whence they could never emerge to invade the peaceful kingdom of his mind. And so once the shock of his wife's death was over, Edward firmly closed the door on haunting recollections and fled with little Marica and her nurse to Greece where he could bury himself in archæological research. Yet he believed himself to be inconsolable; with the power of self-deception peculiar to the artistic temperament he saw himself eternally heart-broken but seeking distraction in the pages of antiquity. That these pages soon engrossed him as his young wife had never done did not occur to him for a moment. The present had always been to him a dream; now its claim on his attention was removed he reverted to his natural element—the Past—with a relief of which he was totally unaware. As time went on his habit of abstraction grew on him. Sometimes for together he would appear to have forgotten Marica's existence; then he would set himself to carry out his system of education with sudden spasmodic fervour.

Marica was just six years old when they went to live in Nice. Edward's mother was now dead, and only his three sisters were left to wonder at his unaccountable decision to buy the Villa Bel Riposo. Why, they asked themselves, should Edward elect to go and inhabit one of the gayest places on the face of the globe? With his apartness from the world he might have been expected to find out some lonely

mountain top or remote hamlet in which to pursue his studies undisturbed. Or if he liked the scenery of the Riviera surely soulful Bordighera with its coterie of intellectual dilletanti would have been more to his taste!

Why Nice?

But Edward had been right in his conjecture. In Bordighera his erudition, combined with his striking personality, would infallibly have brought him into prominence. He could never have succeeded in avoiding the attempts of the little literary and artistic world to draw him into their circle. In cheerful, brainless Nice he was ignored, and this was precisely what he most desired.

The little villa on the deserted bit of sea front provided a retreat as impregnable as the pillar of Saint Simon Stylites or the tub of Diogenes. Nice as known to the world in general never entered into his field of consciousness. Of the flâneurs who thronged the Promenade des Anglais, the Casinos and the restaurants he knew nothing. The great army of mondaines and millionaires; demi-mondaines and déclassés; of parvenus and "rastas" might come and go but Edward Fayne, placidly turning the pages of research in his library at the Villa Bel Riposo, remained serenely unconscious of their existence.

To the ungregarious the Riviera offers its choice of solitudes. Only a few miles from the crowded dining rooms and stifling "salles de jeux," where the tumult of modern life surges night and day, there are restful places to be found, by which the tide of civilization flows unheeded. At the ends of the valleys that run down to the sea there are quiet olive-groves the tourist's foot has never trodden, and in the hills behind the towns are rocky desolations as remote as the heart of Thibet.

It was to these that Edward Fayne betook himself when a need of the outer world called him from his books. Usually he took Marica with him, and these expeditions were the sole breaks in the unvarying monotony of her life. They were the only moments when she felt at ease with her father. Normally his intellectuality crushed her, she felt chilled and constrained by his aloofness from the human side of life which appealed to her so strongly. But once in contact with Nature, animate or inanimate, his inhumanity fell from him like a cloak and he became himself a child of Nature. He would sit on a rock reciting poetry in his melodious voice, or scramble down precipices, like a boy, to pick wild flowers. Sometimes they rode on donkeys over the mountain passes, sometimes they went by boat to the Iles des Lérins, or by train to picnic amongst the ruins of Fréius, and on these occasions her father was always gay and delightful—the cleverest and most entrainant of companions. It was only people that froze him, and above all the people of his own world!

The cocher had been right in his surmise that few people pulled the rusty wire at the gate of the Villa Bel Riposo. Mr. Fayne had successfully eluded any acquaintance with the British Colony. Ever since Marica could remember almost his only visitors had been occasional Orientalists who came to consult the celebrated savant on matters of erudition. Most of them came once and then returned to their universities never to reappear, but one or two came regularly and spent long hours in the library poring over manuscripts. Some of them were kind to the lonely child, whom they would find perched on an orange tree reading some book that she had picked out of the library book shelves. The fat Jewish Rabbi brought her presents of Rahat Lacoum or attar of roses, and der Herr Professor Winkelmann, a charming old man of ninety, took her out for walks to catch butterflies. But her dearest friend of all was the old Russian woman who came and sat with Mr. Fayne so often on winter evenings. She was the only habituée of the Villa who was not a savant, and her claim to Mr. Fayne's friendship was based on attainments hardly less potent than erudition. Princess Potchinoff was psychic. Next to archæology Mr. Fayne cared for nothing so much as psychic phenomena of all descriptions. He would listen, enthralled, by the hour to the old lady's accounts of "manifestations," premonitions and the other supernatural experiences to which she was prone.

Coming into the room on a winter evening, Marica would find the strange figure illumined by the firelight. The Princess with her dried-up brown old face—like a withered apple—her piercing grey eyes, her hard mouth with the brown teeth, stained by continual cigarette-smoking, her felt pork-pie hat jammed over her grey hair. At her side, Kafkaz, the large ragged dog from the Caucasus, who bit everyone but his mistress, would sit huddled and morose. And the Princess would stop in the middle of an experience and exclaim: "Ach, darlin'!" in her mellow contralto voice whilst she held out two lean brown hands to Marica.

Sometimes she invited Marica to tea with her in her odd little appartement in the town. And the child, who had no friends of her own age, would sit perfectly happily opposite the old woman, watching her manipulate the samovar and listening to her stories of bear-hunting and wild life in Russian forests. After tea the Princess would produce a wooden box full of dried fruits that she called "Kievskoe varenye," and then the two friends would smoke together—odd little Russian cigarettes made of straw which Marica found so difficult to keep alight yet enjoyed enormously all the same.

Until this winter the Princess Potchinoff was the only woman who ever came to the villa, and Mr. Fayne was able to congratulate himself on his con-

tinued immunity from invasion.

But his seclusion was destined to be rudely broken into.

One afternoon, some weeks before the visit of the King of Sylvania, Marica, perched in a favourite orange tree with a volume of Boccaccio, had seen to

her surprise a carriage and pair drive up to the little iron gate. Such an event was unprecedented in the history of the Villa; nothing more imposing than a voiture de place had ever before found its way there.

The next moment a magnificent lady of about fifty in trailing velvet, swathed in sables had swept up the pebble path towards the front door. As she passed the orange tree she paused and looked enquiringly at Marica.

"So this is the child?" she said, looking at her through the tortoiseshell lorgnette which was then the fashion. Marica descended nimbly to her feet and stood with her hands behind her back in a pretty attitude of attention.

"And what is your name?" the lady asked

graciously.

"Marica."

"Oh, indeed! What a strange name!"

"Papa called me that-after a nymph in Minturnae."

"How like poor dear Edward!" murmured the lady with a smile. "And what are you reading?" "The Decamerone."

A look of surprise came over the lady's handsome features. "Dear me, how very unsuitable!"

And she hurried onwards to the door of the house. Mr. Fayne, sitting at work in the loggia, looked up blankly at Sigismund's incoherent announcement:

"La Comtesse de Grand Bras!"

The savant rose absent-mindedly. It was evident that he was exercising a severe mental effort in bringing his thoughts back over forty centuries to the present moment.

"Edward, don't you remember me?"

The unaccustomed sound of his Christian name dispersed the bewilderment on his features as he shook hands with his magnificent visitor.

The lady smiled. "I am afraid your manservant found my name unpronounceable. I must announce

myself. I am Lady Grundisburgh!"

"Lady Grundisburgh? Caroline—of course!"
Suddenly it all came back to him. Caroline Dunsfold—Charlotte's friend—the daughter of Lord Burscough. Of course he remembered her perfectly. Now he came to think of it he had known her very well. But after his marriage they had met seldom; and then he had heard of her engagement to Lord Grundisburgh. Since then they had lost sight of each other. He wondered why she had thought it

necessary to come and see him.

He had not the vaguest idea of the place he occupied in Lady Grundisburgh's recollections. As she sat now looking at his fine ascetic features against the faded fresco background of the loggia wall, her mind went back nearly twenty years to the days when she had seen it in so different a setting. How high-souled and aloof it had appeared rising above the sea of unaspiring faces at a London party! It was hardly less beautiful now in its calm immunity from the stress and strain of modern life; time had mellowed rather than aged it, and the lines around the blue eyes lent it a strength that in its smooth youth had been wanting.

Yet Lady Grundisburgh's admiring gaze was tinged with a passionate regret. It was all very well to look like a Greek stoic philosopher wrapped in a mantle of intellectuality but what had Edward's intellect brought him? Hardly anybody—anybody that counted—had ever heard of him, for he was too learned to have become famous outside the innermost

circle of erudition.

Twenty years ago she had foreseen this. A conversation that had taken place at a dinner party recurred to her.

"Fayne will never get anywhere," the man next to her had remarked. "He is incapable of pushing his interests. The only thing for him is to marry an American. An American wife is nowadays the sine qua non to a successful political career."

Lady Caroline had responded with a discreet smile

and a slight raising of the eyebrows, and had thereupon decided to undertake the part herself. Why have recourse to Transatlantic aid when the required dynamic force was to be found so ably embodied in her own person? She was beautiful, influential, welleducated, and though she made no pretence of intellectuality, she possessed the untiring brain which is far more useful in the end than genius. And just as she had made the momentous decision to become the guiding star of Edward Favne's career, he had suddenly announced his engagement to Nora O'Donagh. Lady Caroline betrayed no hint of her disappointment, and a year later married, amidst a flourish of trumpets, her old admirer, Lord Grundisburgh, a man of enormous wealth and a quite remarkable reputation for "common-sense"—a reputation which even the least intellectual can attain with a considerable degree of success by dint of periodically giving vent to impressive platitudes.

In a word Lady Grundisburgh had realized her ambitions. She was one of London's greatest hostesses. Yet in spite of all her triumphs and her increasing popularity, Lady Grundisburgh had never forgotten Edward Fayne—the one totally unworldly human being she had ever encountered on her passage through life. When arriving on an impromptu visit to Nice she heard that he was living there, she lost no time in finding out his address and driving off

immediately to visit him.

Her sudden incursion into the seclusion of the Villa Bel Riposo was the first of a series that occurred during her stay in Nice. Mr. Fayne suffered them with a resignation tinged with mild enjoyment. Her accounts of the world he had left so long ago and whose very existence he had almost forgotten, roused him to a wondering amusement. And it was on one of these occasions that Lady Grundisburgh had spoken of her old friend the King of Sylvania and his wish to make Mr. Fayne's acquaintance.

Her suggestion that Edward should dine with her

at the Cimiez Palace where she was staying, to meet the King and Queen, was courteously but emphatically declined.

"I am sorry, Caroline, but I never dine out. Such

a thing would be contrary to all my habits."

"But King Alexis is so charming, Edward. And he is so anxious to have a talk with you about Babylon. He wants you to tell him what books to read about it. Couldn't you break your rule for once?" urged Lady Grundisburgh. It was a novel situation for her to plead thus for a guest. In London people fought for invitations to her dinners and parties.

But Edward Fayne appeared quite unmoved by the

great lady's condescension.

"Impossible, Caroline," he answered, shaking his head. "If King Alexis wishes to visit my library I

shall be happy to receive him."

And so it had been arranged. King Alexis had accepted the invitation with alacrity. A day and hour had been fixed upon. And then Mr. Fayne, forgetting all about his promise, had gone out and left the monarch to wait in the hall!

It was the most awful disaster in Lady Grundisburgh's career. The outrageous slight that she had been unfortunately the means of inflicting on her illustrious and valued friend was not, as King Alexis himself seemed to think, a matter for amusement but for the most indignant remonstrance.

The day after the event she therefore ordered her carriage and drove hastily to the Villa Bel Riposo.

CHAPTER IV.

THE glittering landau and pair which Lady Grundisburgh had hired for the winter drew up with its customary rattle of harness before the gate. The bell—temporarily repaired by Sigismund—was rung imperiously by the confidential butler who accompanied her on her travels and who in consideration of her rank and position graciously consented to act as footman.

It was a glorious afternoon and Mr. Fayne was sitting at work in a little stucco summer-house covered with trailing roses at the further end of the garden.

Lady Grundisburgh advanced majestically up the garden path, her long velvet gown making a little

ripple of grey pebbles in her wake.

Mr. Fayne, all unconscious of his guilt, came forward smiling, his eyes fixed dreamily on the background of sea that framed her figure. The Mediterranean was at one of its most beautiful moments, for a light mistral was springing up and its intense blueness was tinged here and there with streaks of purple.

"Beautiful! beautiful!" he murmured, motioning his guest to a chair, and then with a wave of the hand indicating the exquisite colour effects. "ἐπὶ οἶνοπα πόντον! Wine-like? Wine-dark? Was that what

Homer meant?"

"I did not come here to-day to discuss Homer!" Lady Grundisburgh interrupted almost brusquely as she sat down, "but to remonstrate with you about

yesterday!"

"Yesterday? Yesterday? What happened yesterday? Yesterday is so long ago!" said Edward Fayne, to whom the period of the Mentuhoteps was as real as last week is to most people.

"My dear Edward!" said Lady Grundisburgh freezingly, "do you mean that you have forgotten about your extraordinary behaviour to King Alexis?"

"Ah yes, of course, of course. The King of Sylvania! It was most unfortunate, Caroline! I

was really distressed to seem so discourteous."

Lady Grundisburgh looked at him coldly. It was evident that he still had not realised the full heinous-

ness of his offence.

"I don't think you are nearly as sorry as you ought to be," she said boldly. "King Alexis is not merely a king but such a charming personality. If for no other reason you might at least have treated a friend of mine with more consideration."

"I am extremely sorry, Caroline. I cannot say

more."

An unmistakeable note of boredom had crept into his voice which Lady Grundisburgh was too socially shrewd to ignore. One may scold a man—rate him to the point of frenzy—but to bore him is the one unpardonable sin. So she diplomatically refrained from further remonstrance.

"I was glad to hear," she remarked in a more pacific tone, "that Marica to some extent atoned for your shortcomings. The King seems to have been delighted with her. Where is the child, by the way?"

Hitherto Lady Grundisburgh had taken little notice of Marica, but the royal approval invested her for the

first time with some interest.

"Marica is in the schoolroom, drawing. I have just left her there," said a deep voice, and Lady Grundisburgh turned to see the strange figure of the Princess Potchinoff appearing round the corner of the garden path.

"Marica's governess, no doubt," was her reflection as she replied with a chilly "Oh indeed!" to the

information volunteered by the newcomer.

But when the old lady sat down near her and taking out an enamel case, extracted and lit a straw cigarette, she began to reconsider her surmise. "Marica draws very cleverly," this odd person observed, emitting a thin whiff of smoke between her brown teeth. "N'est ce pas, mon ami?" she added, turning to Mr. Fayne with the abrupt change of language peculiar to the Slavonic races.

"Oh, extremely well," Mr. Fayne answered

smiling.

So this extraordinary old woman was not the governess, thought Lady Grundisburgh, but some friend of Edward's. What very queer people he associated with! A thousand pities when one remembered that he once had been in the very best set in London society.

Suddenly Edward Fayne awoke to the exigencies of the situation and introduced his guests to each

other.

"Lady Grundisburgh-Princess Potchinoff."

Lady Grundisburgh's countenance underwent a speedy transformation. A surprised deference took the place of the look of chill enquiry. She was too thoroughly English to realise to its full extent the slight significance of the Russian title. To the British mind, however versed in social lore, a princess is always a princess even when coming from a country which uses up its innumerable and superfluous nobility as waiters or droschky drivers.

Lady Grundisburgh, looking across at the Princess, now smiled graciously. She was certainly very odd to look at, but it was the privilege of rank to be able, if one wished, to disregard appearances. Had not her old friend, the dear Duke of Lincoln, been mistaken by a new under-gamekeeper for a poacher on

his own estates?

"You are staying, I think, at the Cimiez Palace?" the Princess asked abruptly.

"Yes."

"Then perhaps you have met a friend of mine who is also there—"

"Ah, dear Prince Bugureff, you mean, no doubt! Quite charming, isn't he?"

Princess Potchinoff smiled drily. Prince Bugureff was her cousin and she frankly detested him. But she only answered:

"No, my friend's name is Dr. Blogg. He is a

bacteriologist."

Lady Grundisburgh looked shocked. "I am afraid I have not met Dr.—Dr. Blogg," she said, pronouncing the name with evident distaste. Then as if anxious to raise the tone of the conversation, she added pleasantly: "There are, however, many really nice people in the hotel. Quite one's own set, you understand."

"Then you need hardly feel that you have left home!" remarked the Princess with a short laugh. The English point of view always amused her. There is a story often told on the Continent of an English "milor" who, before the days of trains, drove round the Lake of Geneva in his coach with one blind down and then returned home without having ever seen the lake. And though the Englishman of to-day has developed a taste for actual sight-seeing, he still often prefers to keep the blind down on social conditions other than his own. By this means it is possible to cover quite a large portion of the earth's surface without being obliged to submit to the painful process known as "widening the mind by foreign travel."

It was thus that Lord Grundisburgh had made his dignified "grand tour" of the world in the sixties. It was thus that Lady Grundisburgh paid her dignified visit to Nice in 1903. She associated with no one unless formally introduced to her by some member of her own circle; more than this—she remained perfectly oblivious to their existence. Except for the increased caloric influence of the sun's rays she was, as Princess Potchinoff had remarked, hardly obliged

to realise that she had left Belgrave Square.

"Yes, it is indeed most delightful," she answered warmly, unmindful of any sarcasm implied by the question. "There are quite a number of really nice people here. Dear old Lord Morningside," she

continued, with the sublime egoism of the society woman which takes it for granted that everyone within her minute but magic circle must be of absorbing interest to the entire universe, "so charming you know, but so rheumatic! It is quite painful to see him. Then Sir John and Lady Tewkesbury—you may remember him, Edward, he was the member for Middleshire in '89. A most interesting man! And Lady Tewkesbury sings quite delightfully. She was one of the Pennistones—very old friends of ours."

Lady Grundisburgh paused, arrested by the somnolent expression which was gradually overspreading the faces of her hearers. Tactfully changing the subject, she turned to Edward with a charming smile

and remarked:

"We were talking of Marica. May one not see the child, Edward?"

Mr. Fayne rang the small handbell at his side and Sigismund arriving in answer, a summons was

despatched to the schoolroom.

Marica arrived smiling and surprised. The magnificent lady's new graciousness was bewildering. The impact of that lady's aquiline nose against her cheek startled her still further. Lady Grundisburgh had never attempted to kiss her before!

"Well, Marica! Drawing, I hear?" Lady

Grundisburgh enquired.

Marica murmured assent.

"Will you show me some of your drawings?"
Marica looked despairingly at Princess Potchinoff.

"Oh, they're really not worth showing."

"Nonsense!" said the Princess gruffly. "Make no excuses, darlin'. Fetch your sketch-book!" And as the girl started reluctantly back to the house, she added with a bass laugh, "It is caricatures that Marica draws best—oh, but very cleverly!"

"She is certainly extremely pretty—and she walks well!" said Lady Grundisburgh approvingly, as the girl in her well-cut blue serge skirt and white silk

blouse came lightly down the garden path.

Mr. Fayne's features lit up with something approaching pleasure; Marica's deer-like grace of movement was distinctly soothing to his artistic

susceptibilities.

"Marica has learnt dancing and calisthenics since she was a small child," he answered, adding hastily, "not with a view to her dancing at balls—a form of diversion in which I sincerely trust she will never wish to indulge!" He smiled gently up at the girl. "No, I have had her taught to dance in order that she might learn to control the inhibitive muscles of the feet. I cannot endure a heavy footstep!"

And certainly Marica's approach was hardly more audible than if one of the fluffy mimosa balls had been blown from the tree overhead and along the

garden path.

She stopped silently beside Lady Grundisburgh's chair, a holland-covered sketch-book in her hand. Lady Grundisburgh bestowed on her one of her most gracious of grande dame smiles.

"You must make friends one day with my girl Anne, Marica," she said. "Anne is, I think, only a year or so older than you. She is just seventeen."

"Is Anne here? In Nice?" Marica asked eagerly. "No. Anne is in London with her governess."

Lady Grundisburgh disapproved of schoolgirls being taken abroad; not a peep should the society butterfly obtain of the outside world until she emerged finally from her chrysalis and burst upon it for good.

"And now show me your drawings!"

Marica put the sketch-book into the pearl-grey kid hand held towards her. And Lady Grundisburgh, putting up her lorgnette, slowly turned the pages.

A medley of sketches, some coloured, some in pen and ink only, met her eyes; there were the people Marica met on her walks along the Promenade des Anglais, black-eyed gamins at play in back streets, peasant women washing clothes on the shingly brink of the Var, humanity in all the phases of which she could catch glimpses. Lady Grundisburgh

smiled, for though many of the subjects seemed to her unworthy of being immortalized the drawing was clever and spirited. She was woman of the world enough to recognise talent.

Suddenly the smile faded from her lips.

Marica, at her side, noticed the change on the imperious features and glanced nervously at the page

on which the lorgnette was focussed.

What had Lady Grundisburgh seen there to displease her? The little sketch in front of her represented an extremely pompous old English gentleman with side whiskers and an air of rigid propriety receiving kisses on both cheeks at once from two sprightly ladies dressed in scarlet as devils, at the Carnival. Marica, who had been present at the scene, had succeeded in exactly catching the expression of haughty indignation mingled with unwilling satisfaction on the face of the victim. It was doubtless very cleverly drawn, but unfortunately the gentleman happened to be no other than Lord Grundisburgh himself!

There could be no doubt about his identity. Lady Grundisburgh, gazing coldly at the page before her, recognised both the dress and features of her illustrious consort beyond any possibility of mistake. Moreover Lord Grundisburgh had himself informed her of the outrage committed on him when he had ventured to walk along the Quai Masséna one day during the Carnival. He had returned, she well remembered, with confetti clinging to his whiskers and protesting indignantly against the license per-

mitted by the Nice authorities.

Marica, who had never seen the great Lord Grundisburgh, stood by innocently oblivious to the nature of her offence.

That Lady Grundisburgh was deeply offended was evident. Closing the book abruptly she handed it back to Marica remarking in the smooth tones the well-trained woman assumes when seriously annoyed:

"It seems a pity, Marica, that you do not choose

more suitable subjects for the exercise of your ertalent. Anne does landscapes, for example. She did some really charming sketches on the moors last year in Scotland."

"But I am only interested in people!" said

Marica.

"It is possible to educate one's taste," Lady

Grundisburgh answered crushingly.

Marica, clasping the sketch-book, made her way back to the schoolroom with angry tears in her eyes. Why should this tiresome old woman ask to see her sketches and then be horrid about them? She could not imagine what had suddenly roused her disapproval.

Meanwhile Lady Grundisburgh turned to Mr.

Fayne and remarked in the same sweet tones:

"I wonder, Edward, that you do not engage a really nice governess for Marica. I have a quite excellent woman for Anne. A governess is so necessary to guide a girl's talents into the right channels. Miss Butterly, for example, not only teaches Anne to paint and play the piano but to do other things that will be required of her later. For example Miss Butterly teaches Anne to write letters."

"An excellent idea!" Mr. Fayne agreed heartily. "Letter writing nowadays seems a lost art. English girls as a rule write letters abominably. They would certainly do well to cultivate the powers of description

of a hundred years ago."

"Oh, I don't mean that kind of letter, Edward. Of course it is very nice to be able to describe things well, but it is not a necessary part of education. No, the letters Anne learns to write are the ones so important to every woman—just the little notes one is so often obliged to write in a hurry to condole or congratulate or to accept an invitation. Anne showed me a really charming letter she had written the other day under Miss Butterly's guidance, to an imaginary friend who had lost her husband in a hunting accident."

To Lady Grundisburgh's surprise a deep bass laugh broke from the Princess Potchinoff.

"Ach, no! But that is really too funny! A letter of condolence learnt in the schoolroom to be used

when required! C'est vraiment drôle, ca!"

Mr. Fayne could not refrain from smiling in sympathy with his old friend. "I am afraid, Caroline, if I were a friend of Anne's I should prefer a rather more spontaneous expression of sympathy. Still no doubt as you say a governess has her advantages," he added in a conciliatory tone.

'A governess would certainly be more qualified

than tutors to fit Marica for society!"

"Society? Who said anything about society?"

Mr. Fayne asked blankly.

"Well, surely some day you intend Marica to return to London and come out in society?"

Mr. Fayne drew in his breath with a little derisive

hiss.

"If by that expression you mean dragged through the rabble of a London season I intend nothing of the

kind. Marica will stay at home with me!"

"Then one day she will probably elope with a drawing master and you will have only yourself to blame!" said Lady Grundisburgh, rising to depart. Edward was quite hopelessly vague and impossible, she said to herself as she drove angrily away down the Promenade.

Princess Potchinoff watched her disappear in the

distance with a grim countenance.

"That is a wurruldly woman!" she remarked abruptly. "She speaks emptiness!"

CHAPTER V.

It was the middle of May, and the heat of the Southern spring drove the inhabitants of Nice to seek refuge during the day-time behind close shutters from the blazing rays of the sun. A burning sirocco swept the towns along the coast, raising swirling clouds of dust along the white roads to smother the few roses that still remained from the April splendour.

The gay world had departed to Paris, London or New York, and the Grundisburghs, with their suite, had long since been whirled back towards Belgrave Square in the dusty train de luxe. The garden of the Villa Bel Riposo was now an arid desert, for Aurelio, according to the custom of Riviera gardeners, had rolled up the turf like a carpet, leaving the red earth bare until the autumn.

Peacefully oblivious to the scene of desolation around him, Mr. Fayne wrestled with discrepancies in Syrian history at his library table. His splendid physique made him immune to all changes of climate. On the coldest winter day he glowed with a comfortable warmth; in tropical heat he was cool and serene as a sacred ibis by the waters of the Nile.

It was usually June before he could make up his mind to seek refuge in a cooler climate, and each year he made a fresh experiment in this direction. One summer he had betaken himself, with Marica, Sigismund and the maid Antonie, to a barren island in the Baltic at which a trading steamer stopped once a month with provisions. But the system of supporting life entirely on tinned food resulted in the whole party being attacked with scurvy, and they had signalled to a Russian schooner which conveyed them back to the haunts of greengrocers.

Another year he had discovered what he believed to

be a really quiet hotel in the Bernese Oberland. The manager assured him that neither Cook nor Lunn sent their unwelcome pilgrims to this select retreat, and he could rest assured that his evenings would not be made hideous by sounds of revelry. But his first meal at the table d'hote revealed a strangeness on the part of his fellow guests which was decidedly disquieting, and on enquiry at the bureau he found he had installed himself and the unfortunate Marica in a sanatorium for the patients of a brain specialist in Berne. "Mais Monsieur n'est donc pas un des malades de Monsieur le Docteur-non? Ah. then perhaps Monsieur would find himself more comfortable at the Grand Hotel?" Mr. Fayne shook his head, a "Grand Hotel" was certainly the last place to suit him; still it was impossible to remain here, since the only room available for him was next door to that of one of the invalids who, having been run over by a motor, now suffered from a deséquilibrement, which consisted in believing himself to be a motor horn, and emitted the most piercing toots at all hours of the night or day. No, so far Mr. Fayne had been unlucky in his search for solitude. This year at last he believed he had found it!

One afternoon earlier in the winter, when taking a long walk with the Rabbi in the mountains behind Dravigny, he had come upon the mediæval chateau of St. Jean du Loup perched on a crag overlooking an abysmal valley. Its lofty isolation enchanted him, and he immediately made enquiries as to the possibility of renting it for the summer. The owners—descendants of the old family of de Montauroux—made no objection to the proposal put before them, and negotiations were speedily concluded.

So at the end of May Mr. Fayne and his household prepared to migrate into their mountain fastness. There were many adieux to be said in Nice, mainly to the owners of the various shops in the town, whom Marica could remember ever since her chin had

reached to the level of their counters.

One evening, in the cool of the brief twilight, she started out with her father to provide themselves with the necessaries of life before leaving civilisation. They began with the timorous Mademoiselle Ponpon, who always cast up her hands in terrified admiration at the idea of a "voyage. "S'en aller en Norvège!" she had cried on Mademoiselle's departure for the Baltic Island. "Ah! quel courage!" She herself never ventured further afield than Monte Carlo. The customers who bought her beautiful parasols with which to journey into foreign lands felt themselves Columbuses indeed.

Madame Pontet, whilst she fitted an infrequent pair of gloves on to Marica's small hand, expended her conversational powers in flattery so extravagant that it ceased to be insincere. Even the most credulous of mondaines never dreamed of taking Madame Pontet's compliments seriously. "La plus belle main de Nice!" was merely the formula with which she slipped the glove over the customer's hand. And "La mieux gantée!" the one that invariably accom-

panied the fastening of the last button.

Plaintive Monsieur Dupuis, whose maison d'antiquités had been for quite ten years in a chronic and alarming state of "liquidation," had always a new "occasion" to offer Monsieur. If Mademoiselle would just mention to Monsieur her papa that a certain Dutch bureau of priceless worth had just come unexpectedly into Monsieur Dupuis' possession . . .? Monsieur Dupuis' boutique was almost the only one that Mr. Fayne ever visited in person. But his passion for antiquities triumphed over his antipathy to streets and shopping. He would wander round for an hour at a time examining old snuff-boxes and musty furniture. The Villa Bel Riposo was filled with a heterogeneous collection of old-world relics.

But to-day the Maison d'Antiquités was a house of mourning. Monsieur Dupuis, his wife explained, had been très souffrant the last few days, and now they

feared the worst.

"Ah, he is in bed of course?" Mr. Fayne enquired.

"Hélas, non, monsieur!"—and Madame Dupuis' eyes filled with tears—"he is going to the bath!"

"Then he must be better?"

Madame Dupuis shook her head ominously. "But no, monsieur, if Emile goes to the bath it is that he feels himself to be dying! Never would he bathe himself otherwise!"

Madame Dupuis' neighbours gathered together in a little group at the back of the shop seemed to take the same view of the situation.

"C'est qu'il va bien mal, bien mal!" they repeated in doleful accents. The taking of a bath was apparently the prelude to extreme unction, and very

few people had survived either.

Erudite Madame Gredin, of the Librairie Anglo-Française, also enjoyed the honour of an occasional visit from the mysterious savant. She entertained a passionate admiration for his beauty and a deep respect for his learning. And, by way of giving him a glimpse of her own modest attainments, she would recommend him editions of the English classics under strange and wonderful names. Would not monsieur care to present mademoiselle with this charming copy of Aurauralie, by Madame Browning, or this little volume of Lor' Byrron's Chilarolle?

The only shop where this delightful exchange of civilities did not take place was that of Mr. Albert Bosham, the English tailor, who, with a tape measure worn imposingly round his neck like a chain of office, received Mr. Fayne's rare orders for new clothing with

an impassive countenance.

Mr. Bosham could be gracious on occasion, but, after the manner of many British tradesmen, only when he felt it was quite worth while. And it was certainly not worth while to wreathe his countenance in smiles for a customer who ordered a new suit once in five years and sent it to him in the interval to have the frayed edges removed. The French shopkeeper, if only from a more far-seeing policy, seldom transacts

business in this manner. He is usually quite as civil to the customer who spends ten francs as the one who writes a cheque for several hundreds. Who knows whether the gentleman with the frayed collar may not to-morrow inherit a fortune of a million? And meanwhile it costs nothing to be pleasant—smiles are cheap! And he bows out the shabby customer as if

he were a departing royalty.

Mrs. Bosham, who sat, fat and florid, at the caisse which occupied the corner of the shop, was of a homelier and more genial temperament. At times she was wont to be what she described as "chatty," and would dilate to Marica or her father on the beauty and accomplishments of her daughter Bessie, who had been sent home to school at Clapham and was now becoming "quite the lady." Bessie, when she returned after this process with yellow hair rolled into innumerable sausage-like curls all over her head, would sometimes take Mrs. Bosham's seat in the caisse and sit staring sullenly out of the window with the air of an exiled empress. If, as it happened occasionally, Mr. Bosham was busy with a more important customer when Marica and her father came into the shop, he would call out to Bessie to attend to Mr. Fayne's requirements, and Bessie, haughtily condescending, would reply in the pure Cockney accents which delighted the heart of Marica. Marica, who could remember nothing of London, it seemed irresistibly funny, and certainly Bessie spoke the dialect to perfection.

But to Mr. Fayne, Bessie Bosham existed only as a "type of vulgarity," in which capacity he had been wont to make use of her for Marica's edification. During the course of lessons he had given her on English composition Mr. Fayne had always insisted on the importance of using words strictly in their true sense. He could not endure the slipshod perversion of terms habitual with many English people. And it was to illustrate the exact meaning of the word "vulgar" that poor Bessie Bosham had been chosen.

"To be vulgar is to be pretentious, therefore Bessie Bosham is vulgar. Old Antoine (the road mender) is not vulgar because he is not pretentious," Mr. Fayne had written at the end of Marica's composition on "What is vulgarity?"

But to-day, to Marica's disappointment, Bessie was

nowhere to be seen.

"Is your daughter away?" she asked casually, missing the flaxen curls in the corner.

To her astonishment, Mrs. Bosham's eves filled with

tears.

"We are in great trouble about Bessie, mademoiselle," she said tremulously; "Bessie has run away."
"Run away? Where to,"

"To America, mademoiselle, with a traveller."

"An explorer, do you mean, Mrs. Bosham? How exciting!" said Marica, immediately seeing a vision of a bronzed explorer from the heart of African forests. She had never dreamt that Bessie, whose whole soul seemed centred on "gentility," should suddenly have become so adventurous! "Where has he travelled?" she enquired eagerly.

"All about the big towns of France and Italy," said Mrs. Bosham indifferently. "Sam Mullins-that's

his name—travels in buttons, mademoiselle."

"Travels in buttons?" Marica repeated blankly, and then Mrs. Mullins explained the nature of Mr. Mullins' calling. A commercial traveller! Decidedly less romantic!

"I trust he will make her a good husband!" Mr. Fayne remarked, with the courtly tact that never deserted him.

"If he marries her, sir!" said Mrs. Bosham bursting into tears; "but at present, you see, he's got a wife alive, and perhaps she won't take steps!"

"Indeed, how very painful!" murmured Mr. Fayne, making hastily for the door. He was more bored than shocked by these domestic revelations; but his innate courtesy stopped short at the point of pretending to take an interest in the "type's" destiny!

CHAPTER VI.

Even during their excursions into the surrounding Favne's "system" exercised country, Mr. over Marica's mind; nothing inartistic must, if possible, be allowed to blur her conceptions of the beautiful. Monte Carlo on this account was strictly banned. When on rare occasions they were obliged to drive through the gardens on their way to the Corniche, the sight of the cupola-ed Casino would rouse him to a frenzy of disgust. His diatribes held none of the disapproval of the moralists who denounce this so-called "stronghold of Satan," for all forms of license or dissipation were entirely incomprehensible to him. It was the vulgarity of the florid edifice and its cockney crowds of visitors that vexed his serene artistic soul.

On the journey to the Château—to be made by train as far as the town of Dravigny—he hoped to encounter no such demoralising spectacles. But after leaving the railway in a little victoria drawn by two nimble ponies a sudden exclamation from her father warned Marica of the presence of danger.

"Shut your eyes, my love!"

And though in obedience to the time-honoured command she lowered her eyelids, she could not for once resist a furtive peep at the object which had excited his disapproval. The highly ornate villa of a successful chocolate maker flashed for an instant on her sight, along the cornice of which blue and yellow dragons of Vallauris pottery were ranged alternately.

Marica suppressed a little shriek of laughter. They were ugly, but could those poor little dragons do her serious harm? She could not imagine what power

they could have to demoralize her!

Dravigny itself delighted Mr. Fayne. His whole being, at variance with modernity, went out in sympathy with this old-world town, left so entirely behind in the onward march of civilisation. Intersected by ladder-like stone staircases that took the place of streets were quiet squares that had remained unchanged for centuries, and at the doors of their hovels the Provençal peasants spun or knitted, roasted coffee or nursed babies just as their ancestors had done from time immemorial. It was as if Pompeii had come to life, and the men and women who two thousand years ago died as they ground their corn and baked their bread, suddenly resumed their interrupted labours.

The ponies, trained to quicken their speed on an upward grade, trotted briskly through the central "Place" of Dravigny, and were soon at the top of the hill and making their way along the straight wide road that leads through olive groves to the mountains behind the town. An hour more and they turned abruptly into the valley of the Loup. For ten kilometres the road now wound tortuously upward, skirting the ravine at the bottom of which the Loup. swollen to overflowing with the melting of the snows, thundered foaming to the sea. As the ravine deepened with the rising of the road, the valley spread out before one's eyes and the distant blue sea-line became slowly visible. The ponies made their way at a foot's pace now, under overhanging rocks beneath which the narrow mountain road had been perilously blasted and the sense of desolation grew as each turning revealed a greater barrenness. Amidst the grey boulders the arid soil brought forth nothing but a few stunted cork trees and dried-up undergrowth. Sheep wandered aimlessly, cropping at the withered grass between the rocks. The tinkle of the sheep bells alone broke the immense silence of this wilderness where no birds herald the coming of the spring.

"Papa, where is St. Jean du Loup?" Marica asked at last, with a sinking heart. Was this the glorious solitude of which her father had so often spoken?

Mr. Fayne smiled and pointed with a thin fore-

finger to the opposite side of the ravine.

"We shall see when we go round the next turning," he answered cheerfully, "we cross a bridge over the Loup and there we are."

And with the turning of the road, St. Jean du Loup

sprang into view.

Marica, gazing at it across the abyss that separated them, reflected that its tale of solitude had only been half told. It was the most desolate place she had ever in her wildest dreams imagined. Far, far up above the valley, the village perched upon its towering crag, overlooked limitless tracts of arid wilderness. Before and on each side the abysmal depths of the ravine surrounded it. Behind it the undergrowth ran back a little way over a flat space surmounted by a further wall of red bare rock that stood out golden in the reflected rays of the setting sun.

St. Jean du Loup is a relic of the early Middle Ages, a tiny fortified town that a thousand years ago withstood the onslaughts of the Saracens. Isolated in this rocky wilderness the little mountain fastness has remained just as it was in the days of the Crusaders. Then as now, it consisted of a collection of stone hovels surmounted by the tower of the little church. Above the natural fortification of the sheer mountain side a wall had been built into the rock, and on the Western side the ancient castle of the Loup

showed its long battlemented front.

There are many mountain villages in Provence answering more or less to this description, all of which tell their own story of primitive apartness from the world around them, but none achieve the dizzy eminence, the weird loneliness that make St. Jean du Loup unique. Few, if any, others boast a château such as the de Montauroux built for themselves like an eyrie on this lofty crag.

Marica, leaning forward to gain a further glimpse of this strange dwelling was filled half with despair, half with excitement at the oddness of the adventure.

Meanwhile her father, looking serenely across the ravine, smiled with deep content as the haven of rest he had sought so long came nearer with each turning of the road.

And now they had crossed the bridge that spanned the vast abyss, and only a short bit of level road lay

between them and the gateway of St. Jean.

The Italian driver, who had walked most of the way beside the carriage, sprang on to the box and with a crack of his whip and a loud "I-yup!" urged the ponies forward at a canter. A few moments more and they clattered noisily under the archway that formed the entrance to the town. A sharp turn to the right brought them to a standstill before an ancient iron gate, open to disclose a paved courtyard whence there emerged the dazed old caretaker of the Château.

The clamour of wheels quickly attracted the attention of the whole population—a matter of some hundred people—who collected in a crowd to watch the arrival of the travellers. The event was unprecedented in the memory of the oldest inhabitant, for now that the de Montauroux were all extinct, no one had ever shown an inclination to take up an abode in these

deserted halls.

In winter picnic parties would drive up from Dravigny and spread banquets on the grass beneath the castle wall and laugh at the queerness of the little town; and then they would drive away again and forget they had ever been there. But in summer not a soul ever came near it or probably remembered its existence; and so from May to October St. Jean du Loup occupied a more impenetrable solitude than the heart of an African desert. Indeed one would be far more likely to find an Englishman sitting on the extreme end of the great wall of China than walking in the streets of St. Jean du Loup in summer time.

And now not only a stranger had arrived, but arrived to stay at "il Castel" for the summer! No wonder black eyes were strained and brown foreheads wrinkled to obtain a glimpse of the extraordinary

foreigners who had elected to come and share their solitude.

But curiosity is short-lived in St. Jean du Loup. Continued attention to any object, however surprising, is a matter of sustained effort impossible to the vacantminded, and the inhabitants of St. Jean, sunk through stagnation to a state of mind bordering on cretinism, after some shaking of the head and exclaiming of "Ah! chè!" soon clattered back to the hovels where, with their donkeys, cats and poultry they lived indiscriminately herded.

Leaving Sigismund and Antoinette to superintend the unloading of the luggage from the dust-laden top of the omnibus. Mr. Favne turned to Marica with a

smile.

"Come!" he said eagerly, and he strode forward through the castle gateway. Marica followed him wonderingly into the courtyard—worn with the onetime tread of knightly steeds and now overgrown with weeds and trodden only by the caretaker and her chickens-through the further archway that led out on to the terrace which formed a rampart of the town. Only the low, crumbling wall, broken here and there by ancient iron balcony, separated it from the terrifying abyss of the valley below.
"Magnificent!" exclaimed Mr. Fayne, his fine

face alight with artistic fervour and the reflected glory

from the western sky.

And the scene spread out before them was indeed overwhelming in its lofty splendour. All around them the vast expanse of mountain and valley lay bathed in the orange mist of sunset. On the opposite side of the ravine the grey mountain crags were turning to gold, whilst on the northern horizon the distant line of snowy Alps loomed rose-coloured through the gathering twilight.

Looking over the sheer edge of the ramparts Marica could see beneath her the precipice down which an ancient zig-zag track descended dizzily into the blue depths of the valley. Down, down at an unfathomable distance the silver line of the Loup had changed to gold in the rays of the setting sun.

And over all an immense silence—a deafening silence—brooded.

Suddenly the sun slipped beneath the horizon: the gold, the rose, the orange splendours were extinguished—the world was bathed in darkness.

Marica shivered. Her warm youth shrank from the awful loneliness, the terrifying silence of this eyrie.

"Papa, isn't it weird?" she said, moving closer to him, overcome with the sudden need of companion-

ship.

"I think it's glorious, Marica!" and his voice thrilled with an almost boyish eagerness. "At last we've found the home of my dreams! The ideal place in which to spend our summers!"

"Summers!" Marica repeated faintly with a despairing inflection on the final s. Was she then to look forward to years of the Château du Loup?

"Yes, summers indeed!" her father answered heartily. "We shall never find anywhere more perfect! Casinos, hotels, railways—all might belong to another world! We are back in the Middle Ages, and over there"—he added with a whimsical smile, pointing to the distant sea-line—"the Crusaders are sailing to the Holy Land!"

His face glowed with the inner light of inspiration. He was doubtless a great actor, lost to the world, for the realms of imagination were far more real to him

than the modern world in which he lived.

And as on many former occasions, Marica found herself carried away by his imaginings. Her father had always possessed this almost mesmeric power of being able to exalt or depress her according to his mood.

And for the moment she caught something of his enthusiasm at being perched up here on this mountain crag away from all the world.

"Let us go indoors now, Papa!" she said, smiling

at him gaily, "remember I have not yet seen the inside of the Castle."

"No," he returned quickly. "But it is delightful too—so entirely in harmony with its surroundings. Not a hint of modernity anywhere."

And so indeed proved to be the case.

The rooms, large and barely furnished, were pervaded with a musty, shut-up odour that increased immensely the sense of desolation. By the light of the flickering candle which her father held aloft Marica caught glimpses of ghostly salons and deserted banqueting halls wrapped in the silence of ages. was perhaps centuries since men had taken their ease in the low wooden chairs around the great hall fireplaces, or women had moved familiarly about the forsaken drawing-rooms. When had the bare table in the dining hall last been laden with good cheer, and the walls, denuded now of armoury and trophies of the chase, rung to the sound of revelry? When did the click of high-heeled slippers last wake echoes up the empty stair, and the spinet in the corner of the big salon that gave forth a quavering note at the touch of Marica's finger, last tell its plaintive tale of love and longing?

Who lived here? What were they like—the race that had made this mountain crag their home and now

had ceased to exist?

And the wooden faces of the Montauroux looking down from their tarnished frames around the walls made no reply. Indeed to judge from their expressions they were hardly more alive when they inhabited the Château than now in the little cemetery at the back of the village. "At any rate," thought Marica, "their ghosts will not walk, for I am sure that not one of them ever had an emotion. They just lived and never thought about it, and now they are dead and quite content to be so."

Upstairs, on the bedroom floor, the eerie feeling deepened. The vault-like passages, where in odd corners hung mouldy crucifixes, led into bedrooms

indescribably gruesome. Large beds set in deep alcoves, surmounted by tarnished gilt frames from which hung faded curtains; worm-eaten prie-dieux, dressing tables draped in ancient cretonne; ragged settees and rickety bureaux, and over all the pervading colour of antiquity!

It was quite the strangest of the many strange

vicissitudes that had made up her short life.

The question of food was not the least of the problems which existence at St. Jean du Loup presented. The little village contained no shop except a tiny stone hovel at the door of which hung strings

of onions and macaroni yellow with age.
"Then how is food to be obtained?" Mr. Fayne asked, bewildered, when Sigismund confronted him, the first morning at the Château, with questions on the matter of supplies. That there should be any difficulty about them had never occurred to him. The population of St. Jean du Loup supported life somehow; he supposed that he would do the same. Yet now the matter was put before him he realised that the diet which suits the constitutions of the Provencal peasant might prove inadequate to his robuster physique—still more so to Marica's. What was to be

Sigismund, smiling and undismayed, with the delightful resourcefulness of his kind, replied that if monsieur would permit, he and "Antonie" would go to Dravigny once a week by diligence and bring back provisions. As to meat—when that was required, the villagers would doubtless slay one of the goats or sheep that wandered about the dry plain at the back of the town. The same goats would provide milka couple should be commandeered at once and tethered to a tree below the Castle terrace. The caretaker's chickens could be depended on for eggs, and a few vegetables might possibly be unearthed at the end of the garden. And in the depths of a cellar Sigismund

had triumphantly discovered some forgotten bottles

of "vin du pays."

"En tout gas, ch'esbère que ce ne sera bas un chassegousin!" he concluded, making use of an expression borrowed from Teresa. For "un vrai chasse-cousin" is the term by which the Provençal describes a wine so bad that it may be depended on to put a stop to the too frequent visits of one's cousins.

"That will do perfectly," said Mr. Fayne, dismissing the subject with evident relief. He never noticed what he ate or drank. Teresa, battling against fearful odds, had produced the night before, a dinner consisting of soupe maigre, risotto, and compote de mirabelles, which satisfied him perfectly. He would have supported life quite contentedly on macaroni.

CHAPTER VII.

THE four months' drought which often comes to the Riviera in summer time had begun, and the sun poured down from a burning sky on to the barren heights of St. Jean du Loup with a fierceness that made even the castle garden with its shady lime-trees unendurable. The parched flower-beds enclosed in neat box borders held nothing now but withered stumps that had once been wallflowers. Round the basin of the old stone fountain overgrown with weeds in the middle terrace dolphins spread aimless mouths from which refreshing streams had ceased to flow. The inhabitants of the Castle retreated behind closed green shutters into a darkness so hot that it might be felt.

Mr. Fayne, impervious to tropical conditions, sat peacefully amongst a sea of manuscript in the salon, whilst Marica was left to explore the resources of the library, where rows of old French books were arranged behind wire doors. As her father had triumphantly explained to the King of Sylvania, none of the light literature that is usually "placed in the hands of a young girl" had ever come her way, and she had been wont to choose her own mental pabulum from her father's bookshelves.

"Keep the modern magazine and novel out of your girl's way," wrote Ruskin; "turn her loose in the old library every wet day and let her alone, she will find what is good for her."

This had been precisely Mr. Fayne's method, and Marica had found "what was good for her" in the Metamorphoses of Ovid, the Decamerone, and the unbowdlerized works of all the poets. Whether a wise choice of modern books that would teach a girl something of the world she has to live in would not

be a better preparation for life is a question Ruskinmercifully perhaps,—never had the chance of proving; in the case of Marica Fayne it resulted in the fact that at fifteen she knew less of real life than the average London child of ten. Her imagination was peopled with mythological beings, and romantic characters which bore no resemblance to the ordinary world of men and women. In the simple unquestioning spirit of childhood she read of the loves of gods and goddesses, of passionate intrigues in old Venice, of Othello, Don Juan and Cleopatra without for a moment dreaming of their counterpart in modern life. These things happened in books; they were delightfully interesting and exciting to read about, but—they had nothing to do with her! On this point she exactly resembled her father; of the "seamy side of life" Mr. Fayne had no conception. He walked the world as in a dream, and where books were concerned he read, as the purely intellectual reads, with an ear for sound, a mind atuned to philosophy, but without the smallest response to the promptings of the senses.

And now suddenly a new field was opened out before Marica. Behind the wire doors of the bookshelves at the Château there lived a world of men and women so real and so human that it was difficult to believe more than a century had passed since their voices were silenced in their graves. As she turned the yellow pages of memoirs she felt she could hear them talking—these gay comtesses and beaux esprits who told so wittily of the happenings at the Court of the Roi Soleil and his successors. By degrees she grew to know them as she had never known people in the world she lived in, to accord them the sympathy or antipathy one feels for real acquaintances. detested the hard old woman who jeered at love all her life and then developed a ridiculous grande passion at seventy; she ached with pity for the lovely Carmelite repenting for thirty-six years her brief spell of triumph; she thrilled at the amazing force of the women who raised themselves from nothing to a place of power and splendour equal to the King's; she followed with breathless interest the career of the grande amoureuse who, plain and forty, collected round her the greatest wits of the brilliant city, though too poor even to offer them a supper. But above all her whole heart went out to the adorable Chevalier who, amidst all the gaiety and adventure of his varied life, found time to love the woman who wrote him letters full of pathos and passion yet mingled with such whimsical wit and badinage and light-hearted gossip that he could never have wearied of their number.

"Je vous aime comme un père, comme un enfant et comme un fou!" Were there men nowadays who loved like this? And far away beyond the northern horizon were there still great cities where people like these lived and thought and talked? For the first time in her life the thought of life in relation to herself came to her.

From this moment the world was changed. saw it now as a place of wonderful possibilities, no longer as a show to be looked on at, but as a stage on which she too would play a part. A new and overwhelming desire for life filled her, and an impatient anger at the solitude in which she was condemned to exist. How could Papa endure it? Had he always been like this—aloof from all the ordinary emotions of mankind? Once he must have been young-or had he never? Was he perhaps born old—a serious child even in its cradle wrapped in abstract thought? Yet he must have had some emotions as he grew older! At any rate he had married! Did he love her mother? He never mentioned her. Perhaps it was because he felt too deeply yes, yes; beneath his Buddha-like impassiveness she felt that there must be untouched reservoirs of feeling. If one could but reach them! One evening she impulsively made the attempt.

She was seated with him in one of the stone balconies of the Château watching the sun set behind the distant Esterelles. Over their heads an eagle with hoarse cries was circling dizzily.

"Marica," Mr. Fayne said in a voice of inward rapture, "look at the twilight creeping up the valley!

Isn't it strange and mysterious?"

"It has done that every evening since we have been here, hasn't it?" she asked with a little shrug of

impatience.

She was so tired of these rhapsodies about the view! Ever since she could remember "the view" had been thrust eternally upon her notice! When she asked for companions, for amusement, for any outlet to her pent-up vitality the same answer was invariably forthcoming: "My love, look at the view!" She had come at last to regard it as her natural enemy.

A pained expression crossed Mr. Fayne's serene

countenance.

"Can one ever have too much of beauty?" he asked reprovingly.

Marica leant forward, her chin on her hand.

"Well, yes, Papa; I'm afraid I think one can!"

"My child!" he returned in grieved tones.

Marica looked at him meditatively. Would it be any use, she wondered, to treat him for once as an ordinary human being and say what was in her mind? Hitherto she had always concluded "Papa" could not understand, and had therefore systematically kept her thoughts under lock and key. But what if he was more human than she had supposed? Why not treat him for once as a normal person and see if he would respond?

"Papa!" she said abruptly, "do you really think beauty—inanimate beauty—Nature or whatever one

calls it—is everything?"

Her father withdrew his eyes from the dim blue valley with a startled expression.

"What do you mean, my love?"

"I mean," she said, "do you think that it can fill one's whole existence? One cannot live in a chronic state of rapture at a view! There are moments," she

added, fired with a sudden courage to give vent to her feelings, "when I almost hate the view!"

Her father turned a pair of indignant blue eyes

upon her.

"Yes, I mean it!" she repeated firmly as her father

continued to gaze at her in impotent wrath.

"Marica!" he said at last, "I can hardly believe my ears. That you, the child I have brought up with so much care, to appreciate beauty, should speak in this amazing way of your inestimable privileges! Think of the teeming millions pent up eternally by bricks and mortar, unable even to look upon the face of Nature! What would a denizen of a London slum give to change with you?"

The question was typical of his attitude towards the human race. The doubtful gratitude of the slum dweller at finding himself transported to the arid heights of St. Jean du Loup never occurred to him for a moment. He firmly believed that what he preferred

must be preferred by everyone.

Marica gave a little shrug. "I don't think I should mind at all being one of London's teeming millions!"

"You would rather live in London than here—or in

Nice?" her father asked in a shocked tone.

For a moment the girl's eyes rested on the distant coast-line, where in a wide bay lay the town of Nice. Nice, the bank clerk's dream, the playground of the millionaire, yet to this girl's restless vision a veritable Siberia—a land of exile and inanition—whilst the distant fog-bound island of which her father spoke so slightingly seemed a land of promise, a place of glorious possibilities! It was there that people lived, that things happened, not here on this drowsy coast of lotus-eaters where it "seemed always afternoon."

"Yes," she said at last with sudden fervour, "I should adore to live in London!" And as Mr. Fayne maintained a pained silence she went on again, too carried away by the subject to feel the chill of his

disapproval.

"The life we lead is not living at all—it is simply

stagnation! We know hardly anyone. We eat, we sleep, we read, go on from day to day, with never a break in the monotony. Nothing ever happens!"

"My dear child," said Mr. Fayne with what he felt to be admirable patience, "when will you realise that monotony is the most beautiful thing in the world?

Look at these pearls, my love!"

Putting out his hand he touched with thin ascetic fingers the string of perfectly matched pearls—her mother's—that the girl wore round her slim white throat. Pearls were the only jewels Mr. Fayne approved; he considered stones with their chiselled facets artificial, but pearls remained just as Nature made them. And these which Marica always wore next her skin to preserve their colour, were exquisite. Mr. Fayne passed them gently through his fingers.

"Have you ever thought, Marica, why they are so beautiful? Is it not because they are all alike? All smooth and round and iridiscent, perfectly matched! The same shape! The same size! The same colour! Would you prefer a bead necklace such as children

thread—of all shapes and sizes?"

"But, Papa, pearls are not the only things that are alike! Beads can be alike too! My life here is like

a string of beads."

"Whose fault is that, my love? You have it in your power to make each one beautiful! Let your life become an unbroken monotony of well-spent days—each beautiful and iridiscent as the pearls you wear!"

As he spoke his eyes rested in an infinite content-

ment on the darkening valley.

Marica turned from him with a sigh. She had no answer to his argument. One could prove anything by similes! She sat in despairing silence filled with the awful loneliness of soul which is the worst tragedy of youth.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was a hot evening in July—too hot even to take a walk after sunset in the mountains as was Mr. Fayne's custom.

"We will wait till the moon is up," he said

serenely.

And so at nine o'clock Marica set out with her father towards the road to Switzerland that lay at the back of the town. By the light of the Southern moon, brilliant in this climate as an electric arc-lamp, they picked their way over the cobbles of the street and out on to the arid wilderness stretching towards the north.

An extraordinary sense of unreality possessed Marica. An immense fatigue made walking over the rock-strewn downland an almost unbearable exertion, yet a feverish mental activity spurred her onwards. With trembling knees and dizzy brain she followed close behind her father as he strode robustly ahead.

"Papa!" she cried at last faintly, "stop a moment.

I am so out of breath!"

"Out of breath, my love? We have hardly walked two hundred yards." He pointed to a grey cliff that rose before them. "Let us climb to the top of that wall of rock and then we will sit and look at the stars."

Hardly conscious how she got there Marica found herself at last seated on the edge of the parapet, which formed the highest point of the mountain ridge behind St. Jean du Loup. As if in a dream she heard her father discourse of solar systems. With the marvellous command of language that had transported the King of Sylvania to ancient Babylon, he wafted her in imagination to the outmost regions of space. He spoke of the moon, that burnt-out mystery whose

lifeless tracts of desolation reflected so divine a radiance, and Marica, gazing at its shadowy continents, wondered whether its desolation could be greater than that which surrounded her. And then he talked of the possibilities of life in the stars, of the immense distances that separated them, of the countless ages of time that had gone to their making until Marica, dizzy with immensities, felt as if she were sitting on the edge of the world looking down into the fathomless abvsses of space. Her head swam with her efforts to realise the terrifying conceptions conjured up by his words. The sense of unreality grew stronger till at last her father himself, the moonlight shedding a ghastly pallor on his features, faded into unreality too. As if in a dream she heard fitfully his melodious voice speaking:

"For countless ages they have been, for countless ages they will continue to be . . . when we too are re-absorbed into the Infinite We are but creatures of a day infinitesimal atoms in the realms of space "

Suddenly she felt she could bear it no more, an uncontrollable horror of mind came over her. Cold shivers ran down her spine. She put out her hand and touched her father's arm.

"Papa, let us go in, I am cold."

He brought his eyes down from the stars with the troubled look of a child rudely awoken from a

pleasant dream.

"Cold, Marica?" he asked incredulously. "Yet you have complained perpetually of the heat!" He laid his long fingers on the back of her hand. "But you are quite warm, my love! I should say you were extremely warm!"

Marica shook her head. "Do let us go in, I am

horribly cold." Her teeth were chattering.

Mr. Favne rose reluctantly and together they made their way back to the Castle.

Next morning Marica was delirious.

Mr. Fayne was distraught. He knew nothing

whatever about illness. What was to be done? As usual Sigismund came to the rescue. There was just time for him to catch the *diligence*—the only public conveyance St. Jean du Loup possessed—and go down

to Dravigny to fetch a doctor.

Mr. Fayne spent the day in a state of acute agitation, pacing the Castle terrace and watching the winding white road that ran threadlike round the opposite side of the ravine. At last a speck appeared on its surface, and half an hour later the diligence rattled through the gateway of the village. The doctor—a simple Provencal in a black alpaca coat and shady straw hat, like an old-fashioned woodcut of a Church missionary—lost no time in diagnosing the case. Mademoiselle was suffering from typhoid fever-it was no wonder for the Castle was well known to be hopelessly insanitary. She must have been ill for some time—had not Mademoiselle complained of migraines—malaises? No doubt! Last night she was certainly in high fever, for to-day her temperature was extremely alarming. If she recovered-and Monsieur le Docteur put his finger impressively to the side of his nose: "Remarquez que je dis si elle se remet! "-she must be taken away immediately to some healthy place for change of air. And meanwhile she must be nursed with all the skill of which they were capable.

Antonie, with the help of Sigismund, proved more than equal to the occasion. Mr. Fayne was of course useless in a sick room. Illness terrified and bewildered him. But Sigismund tip-toeing here and there on slippered feet in obedience to Antonie's orders, fetched trays, milked goats, or boiled water with the

helpful ardour of a big kind child.

When at last Marica recovered it was Sigismund who helped Antonie to carry her downstairs on a chaise longue of his own construction, and wept large unrestrained tears at the joyfulness of the event. The question of a change of air was now to be decided.

"Bourquoi bas la Suisse?" enquired Sigismund

artfully in response to "Monsieur's" helpless "Où aller?"

A sudden inspiration came to Mr. Fayne. He would go to Geneva and visit the delightful Professeur Lenotre!

Sigismund was consulted as to the best hotel, and a peasant riding in to Dravigny with a mule was entrusted with a telegram ordering rooms. The next day Mr. Fayne and his household started on their journey.

Professor Lenotre was "ravished" to renew his acquaintance with the great English savant, and introduced him with pride to his fellow Orientalists. A luncheon party was given in his honour to which Madame Lenotre, who was as charmed with Marica as her husband with Mr. Fayne, particularly requested

that he should bring his daughter.

It was a surprising experience for Marica. Hitherto she had seen her father only as the learned recluse whose moments of spasmodic gaiety were invariably succeeded by a relapse into his normal abstraction. She had known him eloquent in bursts or witty in flashes but never what is called "entertaining." Now for the first time in her life she saw him as the brilliant conversationalist he really was, joining in the learned talk that flowed in various languages around the table with a command of language which filled her with a raging admiration. Equally at home in English, French or German, he scintillated continuously from the consommé to the dessert. If papa could talk like this-set the table in a roar or hold it spellbound in the still more flattering attitude of smiling attention, why did he persistently hide his light beneath a bushel instead of taking his place as he might have done in the world of men?

It was maddening!

Mr. Fayne meanwhile enjoyed himself immensely. Amongst the guests was Herr Wildenthal, an excavator who had lately returned from Asia Minor

and intended before long to start out on an expedition to the ruins of Nineveh. Next day he called on Mr. Fayne at his hotel. The two learned men were charmed with each other. They took walks together, and sat for hours on the balcony discussing matters of historical research.

One day about a fortnight after their arrival in Geneva, Mr. Fayne came and sat down by Marica as she sat lazily looking out at the lake.

"Marica," he said suddenly, "Wildenthal has

asked me to go with him to Syria!"

"To Syria! Do you think of going?"

"I should love it!" he said intensely, "the question is—yourself, my dear."

"Myself? But I should love it too!" cried

Marica eagerly.

Mr. Fayne shook his head. "There is no provision for women in the expedition. I fear that would be impossible. But—" he hesitated.

"What, Papa?"

"Madame Lenotre suggested an alternative. She has an old friend in Geneva—a Mademoiselle Didier—who keeps a pension for girls who come here to study. It is not a school—I strongly object, as you know, to girls' schools—but a pension from which girls can attend lectures in special subjects. It struck me that it might be a good thing for you to be there for a time. Your ignorance, my love, on certain subjects——"

"Yes, I know,—Latin! I loathe Latin, Papa.

May I go to lectures on philosophy?"

The delightful people whose acquaintance she had

made at the château were all philosophes!

Mr. Fayne smiled quite amiably. Papa was in the most delightful of humours, thought Marica. And indeed the prospect of the expedition to Syria pleased him so enormously that he was ready to acquiesce in any suggestion Marica cared to make. At Mademoiselle's Didier's he could feel assured that the girl's education would be continued on the lines he approved.

Had not Madame Lenotre impressed upon him that Mademoiselle Didier was "une personne tout a fait sérieuse " who admitted no flâneuses into her academic shades? If Marica chose to study philosophy in preference to Latin he had no objection.

"Papa," said Marica suddenly, "there is something

else I want to ask you."

"What is it, my love?"

"May I come and see you off when you sail for Svria? "

"At Marseilles?"

"Yes, I've never seen a big ship and I should love to. Do let me come, Papa!"

Finally he agreed. Sigismund and Antonie were to be sent to Nice to pack up at the Villa Bel Riposo. which would be placed in the hands of an agent and Mr. Fayne's household goods deposited in a warehouse. And after that was done Antonie could join Marica at Marseilles and take her back to Geneva. With the Syrian desert before him Mr. Fayne was ready to agree to anything.

Marica stood on the quay at Marseilles and watched the tumult surging around the huge liner that was to take her father to the East. The scene in the harbour thrilled her to the soul. The serried masses of shipping with their forests of masts and dense network of rigging; the smell of the sea; the clamour of strange tongues; the dark-skinned lascars swarming about the ship's sides, filled her with a craving for travel which she had never felt before.

"Papa!" she cried suddenly, turning towards her father and clasping his arm feverishly in her two small hands. "Papa, do take me with you!"

Mr. Fayne looked at her in surprise.

"My love! What do you mean?"

"Take me with you to the East! Never mind about there being no provision for women! I could manage somehow-dress me as a boy! Tell Herr Wildenthal I'm your valet—anything you like, only take me!"

"Marica! You must be mad! How could I possibly do such a thing? Besides, of what possible interest would Syria be to you?"

To Mr. Fayne this voyage was simply the means of arriving at a destination—the adventure of getting

there did not occupy him at all.

"It isn't only Syria!" Marica said eagerly. "I want to go to sea! Oh, Papa, I've never in my life wanted anything so much, and if I live to be a hundred I shall never want anything so much again!" She stopped, choking back the tears that an agony of

longing brought to her eyes.

It was only a few steps across the gangway and the great ship would bear one away to new lands out beyond the sun's setting. She closed her eyes and in imagination felt the warm air of palm islands wafted in her face; she saw the camels padding through the twilight, the temples black against the evening sky; she smelt the scented Eastern dusk and heard the chanting of Eastern prayers All that she had read and dreamt about the East came back to her in one vivid flash of realization, aided by who knows what glimmerings of ancestral memory handed down to her from some adventurous forbear.

Over the sides of her father's ship complacent stewardesses were leaning to listen to the strains of "Il Mendicante Distratto" which an Italian street singer was performing for the benefit of his English audience. Those stupid fat old women were going to the East and she—Marica—was to be left behind!

It was more than she could bear!

The sudden desires of youth are sometimes horribly intense. In after life we seldom crave a thing with the same vehemence. Who cannot look back to childhood and remember one of these moments of passionate craving for some toy or pleasure that no desire of later years has ever approached in intensity? One *must* possess the scarlet watering-can one saw

in the shop window and nothing else will bring us content. We go to sleep dreaming of it, we awake thinking of it, and none of the contents of the over-flowing toy cupboard have power to soothe the ache of unsatisfied desire.

Marica perhaps more than most children had suffered from these moments of acute longing. When she wanted anything she wanted it so desperately that nothing else could bring her consolation. All her life afterwards she remembered that moment on the quay at Marseilles—branded by its intensity upon the grey matter of her brain. And she was forced to watch her father go on board, to see the long decks of the "Europa" slide past her out to sea with an agony of longing at her heart.

"Mademoiselle is very sad at saying good-bye to Monsieur?" Antonie asked sympathetically, with a

glance at the small despairing profile.

"Oh, yes, Antonie!" Marica said hastily, realizing with sudden contrition that in her passionate longing for travel she had forgotten to grieve at parting from the strange being who had till now dominated her life. For the first time she began to wonder what it would be like without him. Would she miss him seriously? And swift upon the heels of the thought followed the further reflection-did she love him? The answer came haltingly. "I love him-as a thought, as an abstraction-not as a human being, a friend, a comrade." Sometimes he seemed so human and she felt all at once that she had misunderstood him, that here at last was the real "Papa." then just as she thought that she had caught him he was gone again and she was left there grasping a shadow—a cold thing made of mist. She knew that she could not, as girls say, "tell him things"; that, except for her little outburst at the Château, she had never made the mistake of attempting it. In all the years that they had spent together no confidences had ever passed between them. There were days when they had been happy together—in an objective way,

a common interest shared, a common pleasure enjoyed. But he had shown her nothing of his feelings and Marica, in her turn, had locked up all her childish troubles in her heart, lest he should see and smile. Ah! how she had always dreaded the gentle derision of his smile!

As the train bore her back to Geneva through the night her thoughts kept up a persistent refrain that blended wearily with the clanking of the engine. "What is Papa?" Again and again the whimsical question recurred to her mind. He was so unreal, so intangible that the more one thought about him the further his personality seemed to recede into space. "Does he exist at all?" she wondered at last, sleepily, "or have I only dreamt him?" And with a smile she drifted into slumber.

CHAPTER IX.

THE "Villa des Tilleuls," Mademoiselle Didier's bension, standing in its shady garden, was ideal spot in which to carry out the system of plain living and high thinking that she had set herself to evolve. Though a Parisian by birth, ten years spent in England as governess to the daughters of Lady Susan Bailey—a pillar of Victorian society—had fired her with an ardour to prove her patrie in no way behind the unimpeachable Britain in the matter of propriety. She worshipped Lady Susan and exclusive circle, but her patriotism had been continually wounded by careless allusions on the part of English people to the lax morals of France. was thus, armed with a mission, that she embarked on her career of teaching the young minds committed to her care to contemplate the world in general and France in particular from the right point of view. She took immense pains to prove to them that far from being irresponsible, France was the most truly serious country in Europe. To the ignorant or vulgar it might appear merely as the land of Zola, of Gustave Droz, "Le Rire" and the "Bouffes Parisiennes"; to Mademoiselle Didier it existed only as the cradle of Racine, of Bossuet and Sainte Beuve, the land in which flourished Rostand and the Théatre Français, the Louvre, the Conservatoire and the Academie! When a Frenchwoman sets herself to worship the proprieties, she would make Mrs. Grundy herself appear abandoned. Mademoiselle Didier in her patriotic fervour created an atmosphere of almost unbreathable refinement.

The jeunes filles she received into her pension were no gay butterflies sent abroad to acquire a smattering

of French and German whereby to enhance their value in society, but young women of earnest purpose--German, Russian, and "Bostonian"—who were there to attend lectures on literature, philosophy or history with the single purpose of learning for learning's sake. Mademoiselle Didier was an ardent féministe; she believed that a woman should carve out her career independently of any male influences. The element of love was never allowed to penetrate into the rarefied atmosphere of the pension, and such vulgar episodes as smuggled notes or clandestine flirtations which form so large a part of the history of many girls' schools had never been dreamt of by Mademoiselle Didier's pensionnaires. They rose early, worked with desperate energy and were strenuous even in their recreations. Half-holidays were spent botanizing or geologizing in the mountains or visiting "historic spots"—nothing more frivolous ever entered into the programme.

Marica, when she had recovered from the strangeness of finding herself for the first time in her life amongst girls of her own age began to feel impatient at so much "earnestness." It was all very well to take an interest in one's work—she too was enthralled by the cours de philosophie-but what was the good of being sixteen if one found amusement in the same things as grizzled professors of sixty? demon of mischief sometimes inspired her to try and demoralize her companions by making them realise the humour of life; and since they were at heart youthful too, they responded in time and Marica became the leader of any fun that might be going. She composed burlesques for them to act, drew preposterous caricatures and celebrated every important event in flowing but often flippant verse. Mademoiselle Didier was sometimes amused but more often pained by Marica's achievements; it was disappointing that the daughter of the great English "savant" should turn out so irresponsible. She had none of the repose or dignity that distinguished

her former pupils—the daughters of Lady Susan Bailey, whom she was fond of quoting as types of the English jeune fille bien elevée. There were two other English girls at the pension besides Marica, but they were serious young women going in later for degrees by way of becoming lecturers on modern languages, and as a feminist Mademoiselle Didier respected them, but since Marica did not contemplate a career it was Edith and Florence Bailey whom she held up to her as models of what a girl might attain to. Highly educated women in society, she would observe, might exercise an important influence over the frivolous and pleasure-loving of their world. Marica listened demurely, and afterwards drew a picture of the Miss Baileys as she imagined them, with hair scratched off their high shining foreheads, appearing at a party, with all the young men hiding behind chairs and sofas to escape them. She grew to detest them as human nature always detests muchquoted paragons.

It was not until the arrival of Cynthia Brinton that

anything exciting happened at the pension.

Marica had been there just a year when one afternoon a landau drove up to the door and an old lady,
in trailing black, like a Du Maurier dowager,
requested an interview with Mademoiselle Didier.
She was announced as the Duchess of Middlesborough, and she proceeded to explain that she had
come on behalf of her grand-daughter Cynthia
Brinton—the child of her daughter, Lady Sophie
Brinton—whom she wished admitted to the pension.

"During your stay in England you no doubt heard of my daughter?" she asked with a smile.

Mademoiselle Didier bowed and blushed. Everybody in the civilised world knew that a certain royal eye had once rested with favour on Lady Sophie, the wife of the well-known soapmaker, Alfred Brinton. New York journalists had greeted her arrival in America with headlines of startling directness. Port Said donkey-boys called their favourite donkeys after

her. And the English society papers were of course full of discreet allusions to her beauty and virtue. But Mademoiselle had imbibed none of the worship of success which is the characteristic of the age, and her morality was of the rigid order that would have found her a place in the Bastille had she happened to live at Versailles in 1750.

"Madame la Duchesse," she said stiffly, "I regret extremely but—I have at present no vacancy in my

pension."

The Duchess paused and then produced her trump

card.

"That is unfortunate," she observed, speaking French with a careful correctness evidently acquired from an English governess in an early Victorian schoolroom. "My friend Lady Susan Bailey felt sure you would be willing to receive my grand-daughter."

"Lady Susan! Ah!" That was a very different matter. How could one refuse anything to a patroness

such as Lady Susan?

Mademoiselle Didier nodded reflectively.

The Duchess was quick to pursue her advantage.

"I beg you to consent, Mademoiselle. Cynthia is very much in need of good influences. You know something perhaps of the milieu in which she has been brought up. She has been left almost entirely to the society of her brothers—and of stable boys—and is well up, I believe, in the last racing news, but there her education ends. No governess will remain with her—she has had thirteen, I believe, but they could do nothing with her. Her only chance, Mademoiselle, is to be removed from her home influences into a different milieu. If you will receive her and do what you can for her, you will have my lasting gratitude. Cynthia, au fond, has a good heart, I am convinced."

"Very well, madame, for your sake and for Lady

Susan's I will consent."

The next term Cynthia arrived. A cab loaded with

enormous trunks drove up to the door, and a tall girl in a boyish-looking coat and short skirt, with a long fair pig-tail and a jaunty hat squashed on to the side of her head strode into the hall followed closely by a wire-haired terrier and a meek-looking English maid. She greeted Mademoiselle Didier in loud cheery tones and then turned to whistle to the terrier who was just starting on a dog's usual tour of inspection round new quarters.

"I hope," said Mademoiselle Didier coldly, "that

you do not expect to the dog to stay?"

"But of course I do. I couldn't be parted from Whisky."

"I regret, but I cannot allow him here." Cynthia's plump face grew red with vexation. "Oh, I say—" she began indignantly, but the

maid stepped forward and whispered something in her ear. Cynthia gave a short laugh.

"Oh, all right. I give in. You'll have to take him back with you to England, Padbury!"

As the days went by, Cynthia proved quite as unmanageable as her grandmother had represented. She whistled about the house, smoked cigarettes in her bedroom, talked at lectures, strummed music-hall refrains when left to practise the piano and cheerfully declined to take anything seriously. Her powers of concentration were non-existent—she never attended to anything for more than two minutes at a time, and it was only a combination of luck and shrewdness that enabled her to keep out of constant disgrace.

In vain Mademoiselle Didier attempted to instil into Cynthia her own theories on mental training. "The mind must be trained to hang on to a thought as the body hangs on to a trapeze," she was fond of remarking, but in the set of society to which Cynthia belonged an exactly opposite system prevailed. There it was considered hopelessly ponderous to think connectedly or seriously about anything. To do so was to become a bore and that was the only really fatal mistake.

Cynthia thought the pension a bore, and everything

in it with the exception of Marica.

"If it wasn't for you," she exclaimed one day, a few weeks after her arrival, taking Marica affectionately by the arm, "I simply couldn't stick it, however much Mother made it worth my while."

"Worth your while? How do you mean?"

Marica asked, puzzled.

"Well, you see it's like this. Grandmama was dead keen on my coming here—Sergeant Sue worked her up to it, I believe."

"Who's Sergeant Sue?"

"Oh, haven't you heard Mademoiselle Didier talk about her? She's always going on about 'Lady Susan.'"

"Lady Susan Bailey is 'Sergeant Sue'?"

"Yes, she's always called that—it just suits her. She's like a great breezy policeman keeping society in order."

"And Edith and Florence-what are they like?"

Marica asked eagerly.

Cynthia turned up her eyes with a groan.

"Tell me if this is like them?" Marica asked, producing the sketch from her desk and handing it

to Cynthia.

"Too flattering," was the immediate verdict. "They're a lot worse than that, Marica. Their clothes are simply appalling—never allowed to wear a hat until they've sat on it, y'know."

"Well, go back to what you were saying about your coming here. Lady Susan suggested it—"

"Yes, and of course Grandmama was on to the idea like a knife, and she persuaded Mother it'd be the one thing for me—you see I'd had thirteen governesses and written a novel at fourteen which the publishers were dying to accept but didn't dare to—it was too improper. Altogether Grandmama thought it was time someone took me in hand—and Mother agreed. But of course I said wild horses wouldn't drag me. So then Mother tried bribery. She said if only I'd

come, she'd give me a really topping hunter when I went home again. I said 'Make it a couple and I'll do it!' But Mother said 'A couple if you get marks for good conduct!' She knew that wasn't likely."

"You're certainly not qualifying for the second

hunter at present, Cynthia!"

"No. I suppose I ought to be more careful. That's what Padbury—Mother's maid, y'know—whispered to me when I saw red because Mademoiselle wouldn't admit Whisky. Well, I'll try and reform."

She put her head on one side and surveyed Marica critically.

"I wish I could be more like you, Marica! You're just the sort of girl Grandmama would adore! You're everything I'm not—but then you're not like an English girl at all."

"In what way?"

"Well, to begin with, you're so awfully polite. English girls aren't—not our sort of girls, I mean. We all say just what we think and do what we feel inclined and don't bother. Grandmama calls us "hooligans"—I suppose that's what we are."

Cynthia's description of herself was not at all wide of the mark-a joyous disregard of everyone else's feelings was the keynote of her life. It was to this no doubt that she owed her bounding vitality-she never took it out of herself by thinking about other people. If she dropped her purse in the street and anyone picked it up for her, she took it back without a word of thanks, and Marica found herself blushing for her in shops from which she would walk out with no response to the polite farewells of the people who served her. She remembered Papa's courtly exits, hat raised, perfectly turned French salutations on his lips, and wondered which was peculiar, he or Cynthia? Yet in spite of the moments when Cynthia jarred on her abominably, Marica found herself drawn towards her by the sheer force of the vitality common to them both. She was so sick of intellect and Cynthia was so alive, so irresponsible, so full of glorious careless

youth, that it was really rather refreshing!

Sometimes Cynthia would drag Marica upstairs and show her all her "things"—her favourite hunting crop, the new riding boots she could not be parted from even abroad, where they were no use to her, the photographs of all her "pals"—and these were legion. They were nearly all young men—in every kind of attire, in polo kit, on ponies, brandishing sticks; in uniform, with braided chests, martially erect, young men singly and young men en masse, with their regiments or on board their ships. Cynthia would recount stories of her adventures, of rendez-vous by moonlight or in smoking rooms, when everyone had gone to bed, to which Marica listened wonderingly-somehow she could not connect Cynthia

with romance in any form.

Yet Cynthia possessed a mysterious fatality for romantic adventures. Wherever she went, young men sprang up in her path. When the pensionnaires one half holiday made the tour du lac in a steamer a young American tourist picked up the gloves she had dropped on the deck and embarked on an interested conversation which was cut short immediately by Fraulein Schnorrer, the German governess in charge of the party; again in the torture chamber of the Château de Chillon Cynthia was found engaged in friendly dialogue with a Russian; and on their walks about Geneva, amorous glances were cast in her direction by rollicking bands of students. Marica, looking at Cynthia's snub-nosed profile, wondered why—had she caught the look in Cynthia's prominent eyes from the front she might have understood. One day a cousin from England appeared on the scene—a cheery boy whom Cynthia encountered quite unexpectedly in a confiserie, where the girls were buying chocolates and whom she immediately introduced to Mlle. Didier as Mr. Venning. After that Fate ordained that Mr. Venning should continually cross their path, and flowers or chocolates with his card attached arrived at the pension for Cynthia.

"Cynthia, how splendid to have such a cousin!" Marica remarked one day as the two girls sat together at the bottom of the garden nibbling the contents of a large satin box that had arrived that morning.

Whereupon Cynthia burst into a peal of laughter. "You dear innocent, you don't really suppose he is my cousin, do you?"

"But you said so!"

"Oh, my dear, one's got to say something to put old Mother Didier off the scent. She'd have a fit if she guessed—but you'll never give it away, will you, Marica?"

"Of course not. But who is Mr. Venning then?"

"I haven't the vaguest idea. He came up and talked to me that day in the confiserie."

"You'd never met him before?"

"No, don't look so horrified; you're much too jolly to be shocked, Marica."

"I don't know that I'm shocked—it simply strikes me as rather like a housemaid."

By one of the many freaks of memory which bring back to one trifling conversations overheard in childhood, she could remember hearing two housemaids talking, during that memorable visit to Aunt Charlotte.

"And, as 'e come along 'e says: 'Good evenin',' and I says 'Good evenin''. And the next night 'e says 'Ullo!' and now we're

keeping company."

Apparently this was Cynthia's method as well, but her face grew crimson at the jibe. Then her habitual good humour came to her rescue and she said with a laugh: "Well, when one of one's grandfather's is a Duke and the other is a soap-boiler one can't be exactly Vere de Vere all through!"

CHAPTER X.

ONE June morning Cynthia came to Marica in great excitement.

"I've just had a letter from Mother and she's coming here for a few days on her way to Aix. Won't it be ripping? Of course you and I will go and see her at her hotel. I want her so much to know you!

You'll come, won't you, Marica?"

Would she? Marica needed no urging; she longed to see the famous Lady Sophie of whose clothes and flirtations and social successes Cynthia had told her so much. Cynthia was always receiving illustrated papers from home containing paragraphs about Lady Sophie, snapshots of Lady Sophie in

every conceivable situation.

"Lady Sophie Brinton's house party to meet the Grand Duke of Langen-Schwalbach," with the hostess herself in tweed seated beside his Imperial Highness; Lady Sophie in the paddock at Newmarket displaying every tooth in her head in response to the bon mot of a sporting peer; Lady Sophie clasping one of her celebrated Bhutia terriers at the Ladies Kennel Club, or clothed in chiffon and pearls à la Madonna, with lilies in the background. But wherever she was to be seen Lady Sophie was evidently having a glorious time—floating always on a sea of unruffled prosperity.

Cynthia had trained her mother too well for that lady not to do what was expected of her, and she telephoned to invite her daughter and Marica to dine with her one evening at the "Hotel des Têtes Couronnées" overlooking the lake. A golden cage lined with looking-glasses whirled them up to the luxurious suite on the second floor where Lady Sophie

in cream charmeuse, lace and pearls, and embedded

in silk cushions received them with open arms.

"Well, dears, how are you both?" she cried gaily, holding out her plump white hands, on which gleamed several enormous single diamonds. "So this is Marica Fayne of whom Cynthia tells me so much in her letters! Delighted to meet you, darling. So glad Cynthia has such a nice friend! Come and sit down by me, dear, and tell me all about yourself!"

She patted the sofa at her side and Marica had leisure to study the famous Lady Sophie at close quarters. On coming into the room, she had appeared to the girl like a quite young woman, now she saw that she was wonderfully made up with skilfully applied skin tints that were quite as delicate as Nature's own, and the bronze hair cut in a straight fringe across her low forehead with a babyish effect, had tints in it which were curiously at variance with the sombre hue of her eyebrows and lashes. Still the tout ensemble was very charming and effective, and the gigantic pearls she wore took the attention off the middle-aged plumpness of the neck on which they rested.

She chattered on happily, never pausing for an answer to her many questions, and then turned to survey Cynthia critically.

"Oh, Cynthia, how perfectly frightful you are looking, darling!—a mass of freckles! Don't they allow you parasols at Mlle. Dindon's?"

"Didier's, mother!" corrected Cynthia.

"How pernickety you are, dear—you know I never can remember names! Dear me, what was I saying? Oh, yes, about your complexion—its dreadful really, do go and put some powder on your nose, darling, before the men arrive."

"What men?" Cynthia asked eagerly.

"Oh well, there's young de Gervaix, who used to be attaché to the Belgian Embassy in London, you remember—he happened to be staying here for a few nights—and Mr. Mitchell Mellison." Cynthia's eyes gleamed. "The Mr. Mitchell Mellison? Theodore Mitchell Mellison who bolted with Lady Framlingham and with Mrs. Marling and with—"

"Oh, yes, dear, I believe he made quite a hobby of week-end elopements," Lady Sophie answered in a rather bored voice, "he's really very good company. By the way the other man I'm expecting is a Mr. Trent, a barrister, such a delightful person I met on the journey. A stupid waiter on the train de luxe upset a plate of soup down my back and Mr. Trent was so kind about it—mopping it up with his own pocket handkerchief—of course we made friends then at once—""

"Mother, you're not fit to travel alone-didn't

Padbury chaperone you?"

"Padbury's ill—didn't I tell you? I've got Léontine with me——"

"Léontine is my French maid," Cynthia explained, she looks a devil but she does hair toppingly."

"She's in my room now—do go in, dear, and powder your nose quickly," said Lady Sophie.

"Come on, Marica," said Cynthia, jumping up and slipping her arm through Marica's, "Mother always has the most priceless face powder—come and try it!"

In the rose and gold bedroom next door, a woman of about thirty with magnificent grey eyes and a criminal mouth was arranging the silver things on the drawing table.

the dressing-table.

"Bon soir, Léontine!" said Cynthia cheerily.

"Bon soir, mademoiselle," the maid answered, looking up without a smile from under black eyebrows that nearly met over her short straight nose.

She was exactly one's idea of a *tricoteuse*, thought Marica, one could see her sitting beside the guillotine knitting in the names of her enemies with that grim mouth set relentlessly. Somehow she felt instinctively that Cynthia's was a name Léontine would not

hesitate to knit in-there was a hostility in the swift

glance that was quite terrifying.

Just then a sharp bark sounded from the other end of the room and a black and white Bhutia terrier jumped off a chair where she had been asleep and came up blinking with black eyes towards them.

"Oh, what a darling!" cried Marica, who adored all animals, clasping the small shaggy body in her arms. And at that the *tricoteuse* suddenly vanished from behind Léontine's features and a radiant

bonhomie shone out.

"Ah, you've found the way to Léontine's heart, Marica," cried Cynthia with a laugh. "She's quite silly about Toti—Toti's one of mother's prize Bhutias, you know. I like wire-haired terriers ever so much better myself—Toti's not a bit sporting, she's no good after rats."

"Killing isn't everything, is it, Toti?" Marica asked fondly, stroking the velvet ears. "I love all

dogs!"

"Ah, it is Mademoiselle who is right," Léontine said, nodding emphatically. "Le sport—toujours le

sport! c'est ridicule!"

But Cynthia was not attending; she had sat down in front of the glass and was contemplating her reflection with some complacency. In front of her on the Empire dressing-table an array of cosmetics in gold or cut-glass jars and boxes was displayed temptingly. A powder puff, the size of a cabbage, reposed in a crystal bowl full of pale pink powder; Cynthia pounced on it eagerly with a cry of delight.

"Oh, Marica, isn't this powder heavenly? Do take some. And this Rosaline is exactly the right shade," she went on, hastily dabbing each round cheek with some pink cream from a tiny gold box.

"Don't I look much better now, Léontine?"

"Mademoiselle est beaucoup trop maquillée!"

said Léontine bluntly.

"All the better—this frock is so hopelessly ingénue!" and she looked down at the folds of her

pale blue muslin frock disparagingly. "Léontine!" she broke off suddenly, "Mademoiselle Marica is much prettier than me, isn't she?"

"N'y a pas un contredire!" Léontine answered, her magnificent grey eyes full of the frankest admira-

tion as she looked at Marica.

Marica's cheeks were flushed and her eyes were sparkling as she stood there, slim and erect, in her clinging gown of white crêpe de chine, cut just low enough to display her pretty round neck and the row of creamy pearls that encircled it. It was the first time in her life that she had ever been into society of any kind, amongst frivolous people like these; the first time that it had ever mattered what she looked like or that she had felt herself part of the gay world. The experience was novel and exciting—it was glorious to forget for a few hours the problem of existence, and the greatest good of the greatest number, and instead, to powder one's nose, look one's very best, and sit down to dinner with charming irresponsible people amidst flowers and music. She could hear the strains of the Italian band playing on the terrace outside the dining-room below.

When they went back to the salon Lady Sophie was entertaining two men who had just arrived—a fair-haired clean-shaven boy of about twenty-five, whom she introduced as Monsieur de Gervaix, and Mr. Mitchell-Mellison, a short middle-aged Englishman, whose face filled Marica with a violent repulsion. As he fixed her with his hard prominent eyes she turned away and prayed that he might not fall to her

share during the course of the evening.

"We are still waiting for Peter Trent!" said Lady Sophie with good natured impatience, "if he's not here in two minutes we'll go down without him. These dear delightful amusing people are always so vague—he may have forgotten all about it. Ah! here you are!" she added as the door opened and a man of about thirty, with a sad, cadaverous face and limp brown hair came into the room.

Marica was glad that he sat next to her at dinner with de Gervaix on the other side-for his air of gentle melancholy made her feel at once at home. She was so unaccustomed to the world in which "brightness" takes the place of wit and recurring peals of laughter pass for gaiety that she felt totally unable to join in the conversation that was taking place between the rest of the party. The principle of Epictetus "Laugh not often nor at many things" had been her father's, to whom the facile mirth of society was "as the crackling of thorns under a pot." Yet it must be very pleasant to be able to talk so gaily. the girl thought enviously as she listened to their chatter of the great world about which she knew so little—the world of London and Paris, of theatres, operas, and the modern books she had never been allowed to read. A little sigh broke from her.

Mr. Trent looked round with a glance of sympa-

thetic enquiry.

"I was thinking how glorious it must be to live in the world!" she said incontrollably.

"Do you think so? Well, for you it's only a

matter of time, isn't it?"

She shook her head. "Oh, no, when I leave school it will probably be to go and live in a tomb at Nineveh!"

"Not an exactly festive prospect, is it?" he

answered sympathetically.

And then she told him all about her father in Syria and how she was staying at the *pension* to study philosophy until the time came for her to go back to him wherever he elected to live.

"It will certainly not be London," she ended

despondently.

"Do you want so much to go to London?"

"Yes, of course!"

Was it not in London she believed one would find the world of men and women whose acquaintance she had made amongst the dusty bookshelves at the Château? Ah, yes, it was there rather than in Paris where the flower of society had perished, that clever and delightful people met and talked and struck

sparks from each other's intellects!

"Ah," she said, taking a deep breath, "if only I could tell you how the thought of London thrills me! Why the very sound of the word is grim and sonorous—there's a sort of reverberation about it so unlike the tinkly ring of 'Paris' or 'Vienna.'"

"But vou've never been there?"

"Only just driving from King's Cross to some other station—I forget the name!—but it was so ugly after the other European capitals we went through that I felt I couldn't bear it—then."

He smiled. If she judged London by the Euston Road it would certainly not compare well with

Vienna!

"And now?" he said.

"Now-oh! I feel I shouldn't mind that a bitnow that I know all there is behind the ugliness!"

"And what is there behind it?" he asked, amused.

"Life!" she cried, with shining eyes. He looked at her with interest. There was something more, he suddenly realized, in this child's enthusiasm than the mild yearnings for gaiety that drive country girls by the thousand up to London. He knew so well the charm, the subtle and increasing fascination of the great city, but he knew too its ruthlessness, its pitiless rejection of everything that has not proved its utility—not only in the underworld of toilers but in the world that calls itself gay. And this girl at his side, in her paper armour of philosophy, was ready to pit her strength against all its unknown forces.

"Ah!" he said gently, "London is a hydra-headed monster. Who knows what face it will show you?"

"How ominously you speak!" she said lightly,

"what could the monster do to me?"

"Nothing," he said, shaking off his forebodings with a laugh. "You, of course, will have plenty of people to help you fight it."

"But I know nobody in London."

"Oh, Marica!" cried Cynthia, who had been listening to the last sentences across the table, "you said once that you knew Lady Grundisburgh!"
"Yes, I'd forgotten Lady Grundisburgh," said

Marica carelessly.

"Dear Caroline Grundisburgh! Such a good creature, isn't she?" murmured Lady Sophie in a

voice of languid enthusiasm.

"Ah, yes, I suppose so!" Marica answered vaguely, and as the conversation broke out again amongst the rest of the party, she said to Mr. Trent: "But at Nice—we all—Papa and our friends and I thought Lady Grundisburgh so very dull!"

Mr. Trent smiled. "And London thinks her very

interesting!"

"Ah, then she knows how to tame the monster?"

"Yes, by the only method possible."

"And what is that?"

"She feeds the brute!" he quoted grimly.
"Does it want feeding? Is it very hungry?"
"Yes, very hungry. It's insatiable."

He saw that she had no idea of his meaning, and with a laughing glance at her bewilderment, he

abruptly changed the subject.

How nice and sympathique was his way of looking at one! she reflected, whilst the expression she kept encountering in Mr. Mitchell Mellinson's fine eyes across the table only filled her with a writhing antipathy. Cynthia, at his side, smiling up into his large fleshy face, seemed perfectly happy, however. Marica could hear them discussing the sights of Paris.

"I want to see everything!" Cynthia was saying "Paradis, Enfer, the Rat Mort, and all the really naughty little shows at Montmartre."

"There are some quite amusing places even within reach of Geneva," Mr. Mitchell Mellison murmured.

But suddenly at this moment a reverberating roar broke into the stillness of the spring evening. The

little party at the table by the window looked at each other in bewilderment. Lady Sophie turned pale. "Please don't be nervous, it's only a lion," Peter

Trent said soothingly.

"A lion?" Lady Sophie cried piercingly.

"Courage, madame!" said the maître d'hôtel advancing diplomatically, "it is but the Menagerie Bezou that is arrived. There is a great fair to-night in the Place de Bel Air."

"A fair?" said Lady Sophie, recovering herself and brightening up immediately. "What fun! I adore a fair. Let's all go to it! What do you say?"

she added, looking round the table.

Everybody agreed that no more amusing way could be found of spending the evening, and after they had dined and enjoyed coffee and cigarettes on the terrace they threw on wraps and walked down to the Place helow.

"Let me be your "cavalier!" whispered de Gervaix to Marica by whose side she found herself borne along through the crowd. Cynthia and Mr. Mellison were disappearing rapidly in the distance, and Lady Sophie had clutched Mr. Trent's arm for protection.

"What shall we do with ourselves?" asked de Gervaix gaily. "Shoot at the eggs on the little fountains? Go to the sorcière for our bonne aventure?

Watch the Egyptian danseuse?"

"Anything! Everything!" cried Marica, thrilled at the adventure. The fair was a blaze of little coloured lights, several string bands and a merry-goround were playing all together. "La Frangesa," "El Capitan," and Strauss waltzes mingled in a crazy medley.

De Gervaix proved the most entrainant of companions; he had all the facility for throwing himself into the spirit of a revel which hardly any Englishman possesses. He picked the egg off the fountain time after time with unerring aim; extorted amazing prophecies as to his future from the Bohemian

fortune-teller, and kept up a fire of chaff with the various showmen.

"Voici la danseuse de Biskra! Entrée un franc! Fauteuils reservés deux francs! Entrez toujours, monsieur, mademoiselle!" one of these was shouting at the door of his tent.

"Shall we see the lady from Biskra?" de Gervaix asked smiling. And they went in and watched a fat and florid German "dancer" clad in a little chiffon and many beads writhing in contortions on a tiny platform. When she sank upon the ground her sides

looked like a collapsing concertina.

"How do you like it?" de Gervaix asked nervously.

"I think it hideous," Marica said frankly, but without a tinge of embarrassment. She was like a very nice simple-minded boy, her companion reflected with a smile.

"Then let us go out and sit under the trees out of

the crowd," he suggested.

"Yes, yes, it is so hot and stuffy here and the music is excruciating."

They made their way out and found a green bench

in a quiet corner.

"Tell me," the young man said suddenly, as he drew Marica's cloak round her shoulders. "Do you hate so much what is ugly? Is that the standard by which you judge everything?"

"I suppose it is," she answered slowly, "at any

rate it is the one I was brought up by."

"I think it is rather a good one—I am sure," he added smiling into her face, "that all beautiful people are really good, and all ugly people are bad."

"Yes, if their expressions are ugly—that's why I

can't bear-" she stopped abruptly.

"I know what you were going to say!"

"Who then?"

"Mitchell Mellison!"

"How did you know?"

"I saw it in your eyes at dinner. You have wonderful instinct. The man is an unspeakable beast, and a cad as well—he would stick at nothing. Tell me," he went on after a pause, "what does your instinct tell you of me?"

She paused and looked at him reflectively. "Oh, your atmosphere's all right!" she said at last, with a nod.

"You wise little thing! Do you know that's just what a friend of mine said the other day?"

"A woman friend?"

"Yes." He looked musingly away and then added, "the greatest friend I have in the world."

"What is her name?"

"Henriette."

"Is she married?"

"No, she is not married."

"Ah, she is a girl like me! Where does she live?"
He smiled—she wondered why. "At a flat in Paris, No. 31 bis, Rue des Vierges Folles."

"But that is where you live! I heard Lady Sophie

say so at dinner!"

"What quick little ears!" His smile, as he turned and looked at her, was still more enigmatical. Then with a quick shrug of his shoulders he added simply, "Yes, Henriette lives there too."

Marica nodded understandingly. It was just like d'Alembert and Julie de Lespinasse! Her ideas of life were taken entirely from books—the conventions had no meaning for her at all.

"How happy you must be!" she said smiling.

"We are generally—very happy."

"Henriette is beautiful?"

"I think her beautiful."

"And clever of course?"

She knew that, for had not all the women that men cared so much to be with *infiniment d'esprit*? That, she had always understood, was their principal charm.

"Yes, in a sense Henriette is clever," the young man answered with another little shrug of the

shoulders.

Marica looked at him wonderingly. He did not seem to care to talk about this delightful friend of his! D'Alembert was much more eloquent in praise of his "divine Eliza!"

"You must have been very sorry to leave her in

Paris," she remarked gently.

"Oh, I was." And after a pause he added, "But I am not sorry now. I did not know, you see, that I was going to meet such a charming little pensionnaire. I had always imagined too that pensionnaires were banales, but now I see that they can be extremely piquantes." And he smiled quietly to himself.

Later as they walked about amongst the flaring booths of the fair, where eager round-eyed children clasping sous in sticky fingers gathered round cheap

sweet stalls, Marica remarked gaily:

"You must not forget to buy a fairing for Henriette. You will have to take her back something!"

"Of course. How nice of you to remind me!

What do you think she would like?"

"I don't know Henriette's tastes."

"Well, what would you like if you were she?"

"I think the gingerbread pigs are enchanting!"
"What an excellent idea! And Henriette adores pain d'épice."

"Then you must buy her a large one and have her

name written on it in white sugar!"

"Splendid! But since the idea is all yours, may I not take it to her from you? That would please her."

"Ah yes. Tell her that I chose it and that I send

it to her with my love."

And de Gervaix laughed again quietly to himself, whilst the proprietor of the stall inscribed an exquisite "Henriette" in sugar on the pig's fat side. Then it was carefully wrapped in paper and delivered to de Gervaix to carry home.

At that moment Lady Sophie's cheery voice broke

on their ears.

"We've had a perfectly splendid time!" she cried, making her way towards them through the crowd followed by Peter Trent, who was clasping several prizes she had won in a shooting gallery.

"And now," Lady Sophie added, yawning unrestrainedly, "we'll all go home to bed. Do find

Cynthia, Mr. Trent!"

The party was at last collected, and they made their

way back to the hotel in the moonlight.

Marica found herself beside Peter Trent, to whom she gaily recounted the history of Henriette and the gingerbread pig. But he did not seem particularly amused, and shot a resentful glance at de Gervaix's back walking ahead of them.

"What it is to have been brought up at the feet of the philosophers!" he said gently, and a moment later he added, "Tell me, when will it be any use for me to begin getting invited to Grundisburgh House?"

"To see Lady Grundisburgh?" she asked demurely.

"Yes, and incidentally to study philosophy. I should love you to explain Plato to me when we meet again."

"In that case," she said, "you had better not go to Grundisburgh House but to Nineveh, and perhaps

I will give you tea in our tomb!"

And with this festive invitation he had to rest content.

CHAPTER XI.

CYNTHIA returned to the *pension* immensely elated at her success with the notorious Mr. Mitchell-Mellison. To have been for two whole hours the object of this irresistible heart-breaker's exclusive attentions was no small thing for the schoolgirl of sixteen. Heaps of "smart women" had pined for him in vain! She told Marica all the details of his elopement with Lady Framlingham. But Marica with the bluntness of extreme youth had responded:

"I couldn't bear his thick neck and bulging eyes.

He struck me as repulsive."

Whereat Cynthia retired into an offended silence and refrained from further confidences. At bed time she went straight to her room instead of tapping at Marica's door, hair brush in hand, for a heart to heart talk about her chaotic emotions, and on the following evening she excused herself early from the salon and went to bed at nine o'clock with what she described as a "splitting headache."

But Mlle. Didier, looking into her clear blue eyes, that gave no hint of congested nerve centres behind

them, looked incredulous.

It was a hot summer night, and an hour later Marica leant out of her window before jumping into bed and took a deep breath of rose-scented air. How delicious the garden looked in the moonlight! It would be heavenly to wander out over the lawn and sniff the masses of pink ramblers that tumbled from the walls. But apparently some one else had been inspired by the same craving, for surely that was a footstep on the pebble path beneath the window? Marica looked out cautiously—just in time to catch a glimpse of a shadowy figure flitting across the

moonlit spaces between the trees and disappearing into the darkness beyond. Who could it be? There had been no time to recognise anyone. She drew back into the room and climbed into bed wondering.

But just as she turned off the electric switch and her eyes were closing sleepily a touch on her shoulder roused her, the light flashed on again, and she saw Mlle. Didier, in a state of agitation and déshabille, standing over her.

"Marica, wake up! Where is Cynthia?"

"Cynthia? Didn't she go to bed with a head-ache?"

"She is not in her room—I looked in to see if she was really suffering, and I found it empty—Cynthia confides in you—what does it mean, Marica?"

"I haven't an idea, Mademoiselle."

And then the shadowy figure in the moonlight

recurred suddenly to her memory.

"Can Cynthia have gone into the garden? The night is hot, she may have felt a craving for fresh air."

"But she would not dare to leave the house without

permission—besides the doors are locked."

Suddenly an idea seemed to occur to the distracted lady, and she hurried into the adjoining room which was Cynthia's.

"Marica!" she called piercingly the next moment,

"Cynthia must have got out by the window!"

It was certainly an easy descent by means of the thick stemmed creepers that climbed up the side of the Villa, and the flower-bed down below could be relied on to receive one's impact noiselessly. And indeed a flattened geranium, which the moonlight illuminated, testified to a heavy weight having recently descended upon it.

Marica repressed the giggle which no normally constituted schoolgirl could prevent from rising within her at the thought of such an escapade on the part of a comrade. To slide down the school wall by night and go forth in search of adventure has been a

climax of daring that never yet failed to thrill the heart of youth. But Mlle. Didier, tremulous and white-lipped, could see no humour in the situation. Sternly ordering Marica back to bed she set forth on a voyage of discovery.

Marica lay awake for some time in the darkness listening, and then as nothing happened her eyes

closed sleepily and she knew no more.

There was no Cynthia to be seen at breakfast the next morning, nor was any explanation of her absence forthcoming until the meal had ended. Then Mlle. Didier, who had maintained a Sphinx-like silence behind the large coffee pot, rose and made a startling announcement.

"Mesdemoiselles, I wish to make it known to you that Miss Cynthia Brinton is no longer an inmate of this pension. I must request you all to ask no questions and to refrain from mentioning her name in future."

What had Cynthia done? Speculations were rife on all sides and provided a topic for whispered con-

versations during several days to come.

Cynthia had been missing from her room late at night. This much information Marica was able to supply, but beyond that she could only guess at what had occurred. Of course there was some young man in the question, but which of the many it was impossible to guess.

But the next week brought Marica a letter in Cynthia's large illiterate handwriting—she opened it

eagerly.

"What-Ho!" it began brightly, "Isn't it a piece of luck getting whirled off like this into the end of the London season? I'm staying with Grandmama in Grosvenor Square and putting in a topping time at last. She hasn't a notion, poor dear, why I left the pension so hurriedly. I told her measles had broken out—not bad, was it? I really couldn't stick it any longer—except for you, dear old girl, it was

really too awful and so I think I made rather a neat exit. That little beano of mine just did the trick—you should have seen Mother Didier's face when she found I'd been supping tête-à-tête with Theodore Mellison at the Café des Tourterelles—it is a sultry spot, I'll admit. Well, so long, don't forget me, if you want some fun in England come and look me up. You'll find Lady G.'s set heavy going.

Yours ever,

Cynthia."

Marica put down the letter feeling faintly sea-sick. So it was with Mr. Mitchell-Mellison Cynthia had made a nocturnal rendezvous and slipped out of her window to go out and meet! To Marica, the affair, which hitherto had held something of the glamour of adventure, became merely sordid and revolting. How could Cynthia? How could she? Marica took the letter up to her bedroom, and striking a match carefully set light to it and to the photograph of herself that Cynthia had lately given her. She could never like Cynthia again—never!

After that the *pension* settled down into its habitual calm. No erotic incidents ever occurred again to disturb the even tenor of its way or the serenity of its founder. Marica's days became, as before, strings of pearls—according to Mr. Fayne—but grey pearls that at times she longed desperately to change for

more variegated hues.

Her father's days were like a string of pearls too—so Marica gathered from the infrequent letters that arrived from Syria. Mr. Fayne was a man who wrote either at immense length or not at all. A brief "chatty" note would have been an impossibility to him. He covered large sheets of foreign paper with minute, scholarly writing, describing in detail the progress of the researches in which he and Professor Wildenthal were engaged. Then months passed bringing no news at all. He never spoke of returning. Months passed into years and still he remained on,

peacefully probing the desert sand for relics of the dim past. Did he never intend to come back Marica wondered sometimes? Would twenty years hence find him still dwelling peacefully in his tomb in the Syrian desert, and herself, grown grey with speculation on the unknowable, still at the Villa des Tilleuls—a middle-aged schoolgirl ceaselessly attend-

ing "cours de philosophie et de littérature?"

It never seemed to occur to her father that she was growing up. He never referred to the future: the present entirely absorbed him. Marica, looking across at the mountains that enclosed the Lake of Geneva, used to feel that her life was just like thatshut in by mountains beyond which she could not see. What was it to be like in the years she felt coming towards her, those wonderful years that hold all the greatest possibilities of a woman's life? Once her education had arrived at that point which would necessitate her leaving the Villa des Tilleuls-neither Mr. Fayne or Mademoiselle Didier ever spoke of a girl's education being "finished"!—would he send for her perhaps to join him in his tomb at Nineveh? And the lugubriousness of the prospect was so awful as to be funny. There was nothing to do but laugh!

One day when Marica was nearly nineteen a letter arrived from Syria addressed in a strange handwriting. It was from Herr Wildenthal saying that Mr. Fayne had been taken seriously ill with fever and his recovery was doubtful. When a man has eluded the power of disease all his life it seems that once the monster has at last laid hold of him, it rends him with a mercilessness seldom shown to the weakling. For weeks Mr. Fayne lay between life and death, his strong frame the battlefield between the monster and his own resolute hold on life. And the latter won the day. A letter came at last in the familiar hand, classical still, but strangely enfeebled, saying that he was now convalescent. "The doctor insists, however," it ended, "on my returning to Europe since I can no longer remain in this climate. I have

decided therefore to settle for a time in London in order to be near the British Museum, where I shall work at the book on Nineveh which I am now writing. I start almost immediately, and then, my love, you may join me in London at the end of the present term."

In the middle of November Mr. Fayne wrote from the Hotel Russell where he was staying until he found a house to suit him. And a fortnight later a letter announced that he had moved into a little house in Blenheim Gardens, Kensington. Aunt Charlotte, who was now a widow, had kindly engaged servants for him and helped him with the necessary preparations. Marica was to join him there as soon as the Christmas vacation arrived. It was one of the charming letters that from to time Papa wrote her which never failed to bring the tears to Marica's eyes.

"As I wander through the empty rooms how melancholy they seem! Yet my sadness is quickly dispelled by the pleasant thought that soon you will be with me! You little know, dear child,

how deeply your father loves you!"

He spoke of the drawing-room which was to be Marica's own to arrange as she liked best—"at present rather large and bleak, but your presence there will make it quite charming! I have had it re-papered in white with a rose frieze to please your taste, not mine, my love!" He had often smiled at Marica's liking for gay colours. And Marica as usual when one of these letters reached her, was filled with self-reproach at the thought of how she had misunderstood Papa in thinking he was merely an embodied intellect—of course he was really full of feeling down beneath his crust of erudition. She read the letter through a dozen times and slept with it beneath her pillow.

It was glorious, Marica felt, when one day in December she bade good-bye to the little world at the Villa des Tilleuls. She was too excited to feel the parting from her companions. They were good creatures, but somehow she had made no great friendships amongst them. The loneliness of her childhood had bred in her a dreamy apartness that had prevented her from ever feeling quite one of them. And the years that she had spent with them had seemed to her like the time one spends in a station waiting-room where one talks in a desultory way to other travellers, but with a mind all the time intent on the arrival of the train that is to bear one away. And when the whistle announces that the moment has come, one leaves these shadowy companions with scant regret.

Now at last the whistle had sounded and the train had started on its journey!

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

THE two English girls from the Villa des Tilleuls with whom Marica travelled to England watched the white cliffs of Kent breaking through the mist with little emotion. They were both serious, well-informed young women, and had made the journey many times before. And once in the train speeding towards Charing Cross they became absorbed in "Strand Magazines" to the entire exclusion of everything beside.

But Marica, far too excited to read, sat looking out on the green fields of Kent in a dream of expectancy. In the opposite corner of the carriage a Frenchman, visiting England for the first time also gazed out of the window murmuring at intervals:

"Ciel! Que c'est respectable!"

He had heard all his life of British respectability and was therefore on the look out for it—ready to find it immediately on landing, in the scenery. And in truth he was not far wrong, for even in her fields and hedgerows England still evinces something of the spirit of law-abiding orderliness and patient industry that has so far been the foundation of her glory and power.

When Socialism shall have had its way and the agricultural labourer has been convinced of the indignity of his toil, a different England—desolate and uncared for—may meet the traveller's eye. But on this winter day the peaceful life of rural England was still apparent. Farmers with as yet no aspirations for brief remunerative work in city offices, felt no degradation in their lot as they rode about on

sturdy cobs inspecting cattle. Healthy cottagers who did not know they ought to be living in suburban flats with every modern convenience and trams to convey them nightly to the theatre, still fed their chickens, hung out their washing and called to rosycheeked babies in the cottage gardens.

Gradually houses began to spring up on all sides. The red-brick desert of the suburbs blotted out the green fields. And then the red brick turned to grey and the labyrinth of mean streets grew thicker.

Ah! here was the misery they talked of on the continent, thought Marica, as she looked along the lines of wretched dwellings all exactly alike, all

squalid, hideous, unaspiring.

And yet not wholly unaspiring! The thought "Perhaps the people who live in them don't mind!" died as it was born. It was no use hoping that the dwellers in this ghastly limbo had no sense of beauty, no craving for happier things, for the contrary was painfully evident. On the sill of nearly every dirty window large or small, curtainless or draped with ragged lace, whole or patched—there stood a flowerpot. And every single one was empty! These people loved flowers then, and the flowers they had loved had died, and now they had nothing left but ugliness and squalor. The tragedy of the empty flower-pots filled the girl, who had been brought up on beauty, with a passionate pity.

"If only I were a millionaire," she thought, "I would go round filling all these empty pots with the

loveliest flowers I could buy!"

And then the train rushed out from among the mean streets and a few moments later the Thames, veiled in mist, and the grey towers of Westminster broke on her sight.

Marica and the Frenchman startled their comcompanions by breaking simultaneously into a cry of joy.

"Ah! que c'est beau!"

"Oh, beautiful!"

And so before Marica had set foot in London she had already seen a glimpse of both its squalor and its splendour. Decidedly the great city was as mysterious as it was described. As the train stopped at last in the huge glass-domed station, the Frenchman descended on to the platform to be embraced heartily on both cheeks by a fellow countryman. Gertrude and Muriel were borne away by affectionate relations.

There was no one to meet Marica.

Standing alone in the crowd on the platform she tried—almost with success—to believe that she did not feel disappointed. Who should be there? Certainly not Papa, who was still probably far too weak to undertake any unnecessary exertion. The aunts in Queen's Gate? That would be expecting too much of people whom she hardly knew. The fatherly solicitude of the English porter—surely the flower of his kind!—helped to cheer her waning spirits. After all what did half-an-hour more of solitude matter when she was to be at home so soon?

At home! How strange it sounded! At last her wanderings had ended and she was going to be like other girls—to have her own home—her own niche in the big world. She wondered where she would find Papa? In the rose-wreathed drawing-room, waiting for her over the fire? Or perhaps he would be well enough to come downstairs to meet her in the hall? Or even on the threshold? She smiled as she pictured the door thrown open and the familiar dreamy face welcoming her. Through the windows of the four-wheeler that bore her westwards she looked out breathlessly at the surging streets.

"I belong here!" she said to herself with a sudden

thrill of pride.

Ah! Fate had been kind! She might have been born in some sleepy ville de province, or in a hideous manufacturing town in the north of England; she might have been a mild genevoise, or a native of Montreal or Melbourne! But instead Fate had ordained that she should belong to London—the

greatest, the most amazing, the most many-sided city the world has ever seen. Here was her place in the scheme of things—in this London, grey with age, yet thrilling with the vigour of modernity, amidst these hurrying crowds where hearts as young and eager as her own beat to the music of life!—life!—life!

And now the cab had made its way through the denser traffic and was pursuing a peaceful course through the long, empty roads of South Kensington. She was nearly home now—the cabman had said it was half-an-hour's drive and already twenty-five minutes had passed. Blenheim Gardens! There it was-written up in black letters at the corner of a red-brick street. The numbers flashed by—30, 35, 40 52! She had arrived!

She jumped out eagerly and rang the bell. Several minutes passed. To Marica, in her impatience, they seemed endless. And then the door was slowly opened and a dusty and rheumatic butler with a

bewildered expression stood before her.

"This is Mr. Fayne's house, isn't it?" she asked blankly.

The old man cleared his throat before replying in

hesitating tones:

"Yes, mum. Mr. Fayne lives here but he's not at home just now."

"But am I not expected to-day? I am Miss

Fayne!"

The light of a dawning intelligence broke over the butler's face.

"Oh, I'm sure I beg your pardon, mum," he said, opening the door wider. "Mr. Fayne did mention about a week ago that he was expecting you but he didn't say exactly which day, you understand, mum."

"And you say he is not at home?"
"No, mum. Mr. Fayne has not yet returned from the Museum. We don't expect him back till six o'clock." He took a bulging silver watch out of his waistcoat pocket and looked at it ruminatingly. "That'll be another hour!" he added mournfully.

"Anyhow," said Marica, swallowing a large lump that had gathered in her throat, "please have the luggage taken down." And she walked in at the door.

Resisting the impulse to sink down on the bottom step of the staircase that confronted her and burst into tears, she opened one door after another and peeped into the rooms. All were, like the hall, low-ceilinged and old-fashioned. "Quaint," Marica said to herself in a heroic effort not to give way to the feeling of desperate depression that threatened to overcome her.

We are all of us aware of the strange sensations some houses give us immediately on entering them. One, gay and pleasant outwardly, casts a gloom over our spirits; whilst in another, of sober aspect, a sense of well-being steals over us. It is almost as if voices spoke to us saying: "Be happy while you may, for life is short!" or murmuring: "Peace is the best that you can hope for!" whilst another in blatant tones shouts aloud of riches.

52 Blenheim Gardens, had its voices—old voices, too tired for philosophy, that quavered in dim corners of the futility of effort. It seemed that only old footsteps had climbed painfully up and down the narrow stair, and only old eyes had looked out through the windows at the world beyond as at some half forgotten show. It was impossible to imagine that vivid pulsating youth had ever run its joyous course between these walls.

A short dark passage leading from the hall ended with a door which she rightly guessed to be that of her father's study. Opening it she found herself in a long room looking out on a back garden; the walls entirely lined with books, the writing table piled high with manuscripts just as they had always been at the Villa Bel Riposo. And on the walls familiar faces greeted her—Chafra on his broken throne with the remoteness of the pyramid in which he lies stamped on his placid features, and Rameses II, eagle-nosed

and close-lipped, whose imperious sternness 4,000 years have been powerless to destroy. On either side of the mantelpiece hung framed pages from the Book of the Dead. A large table in the corner was covered with broken fragments of pottery carefully laid out on cotton wool—evidently the result of Mr. Fayne's recent researches.

Éverything spoke of the past and the infinitely remote past only. There was nothing to remind one that here one was in the very heart of modern civilisa-

tion

"Tea is served in the drawing-room, mum!" a husky voice breathed close to her ear.

She turned hastily. It was the old butler who in noiseless elastic-sided boots had padded into the room

over the soft Persian carpet.

The words brought a sudden glow of comfort; not only the prospect of tea—and now Marica came to think of it she was extremely hungry—but the thought of the drawing-room still unexplored. The drawing-room with the roses! There at any rate one might hope to find an atmosphere less redolent of the tomb!

Yet even the concession to her florid taste in wall papers—and this one was certainly charming—did not dispel the sense of desolation which the big bleak room threw over her. Like the best parlour of the poor it was evidently never lived in. The uncompromising chintz-clad chairs and sofas showed no signs of human contact. A chill lingered in the close shut-up air. Except around the walls there was not a flower anywhere. On the mantelpiece stood a large frame containing a photograph of herself taken by a Geneva photographer, which she had sent her father two years ago. Nothing else familiar met her eveonly her own face confronted her from amongst these strange surroundings. Though the evening was chilly there was no fire nor was it possible to light one since the grate was stuffed laboriously with white horsehair and gold tinsel. In front of this, on the hearthrug, the tea-table was set out, and on it an

immense Queen Anne teapot, some milk in a kitchen

jug and a plate of thick bread and butter.

"You'll excuse things not being quite as they should be!" the old butler, whose name he told Marica was Denman, remarked as she glanced ruefully at the feast. "There's uncommon little glass and china in this house you see, mum, and Mr. Fayne don't take much account—"

"I understand!" said Marica, nodding.

"And then with you not being, so to speak, expected—" he shook his head dolefully and made his way rheumatically to the door.

"But if I am not expected!" Marica called after him gently, pausing in the act of pouring herself out a cup of what tasted more like boiled hay than anything she had ever encountered, "If I am not expected, Denman, I suppose there is no room ready for me?"

Denman shook his head again several times slowly backwards and forwards. It was evident that he was utterly bewildered by the turn affairs had taken and his tired old brain strove bravely to rise to the occasion. His training stood him in good stead. Pulling himself together he answered with the dignity that a lifetime passed in "the best families" had taught him:

I am afraid not, mum, but I will apprise Sarah

of your arrival!"

Going out on to the landing later Marica encountered Sarah—the elderly gap-toothed housemaid Aunt Charlotte had discovered at the Christian Ladies Aid Society—making her way upstairs in the state of bewildered consternation that any unforeseen event usually brings about in the housemaidenly mind.

There was no room prepared, she said, and her brain seemed paralysed at the idea of setting to work at a moment's notice to get one ready. What did Sarah expect, Marica wondered—that she should sleep on the doorstep or return forthwith to Geneva? The

task of impromptu bed-making was evidently one she had never before been required to attempt.

And Marica, unaccustomed to giving peremptory orders, found herself only murmuring plaintively: "Still I must sleep somewhere!"

Whereat Sarah, dazed and mumbling, proceeded

to the linen cupboard.

Just then the front door down below could be heard opening, and a moment later Denman's halting footstep crossed the hall.

"Miss Fayne has arrived from abroad, sir!" Marica

heard him announcing.

It was Papa! In a moment she had flown down

the stairs to greet him.

An old man, curiously unfamiliar, came towards her. Was this really her father? Papa who had started for Syria erect and vigorous in the prime of manhood and who stood before her now bent and feeble, with dim blue eyes trying to pierce the darkness of the hall. All vexation at his forgetfulness left her as she kissed his thin cheek.

"So you forgot I was coming, Papa?" she asked

with a little reproachful laugh.

He shook his head sadly.

"My dear child! My dear little Marica! I cannot imagine how the date can have slipped my memory! It was only the date of course. You did not suppose for a moment," he added anxiously, "that I had forgotten you were coming at all?"

"Oh no, Papa, of course I knew it was only the

date!" Marica said soothingly.

She saw that he was seriously distressed. The

blue eyes were full of helpless contrition.

"I cannot tell you, my love, how grieved I am!" he said gently, patting her shoulder and then imprinting a kiss—light as a dream kiss—on her forehead. "I can only account for it by the fact that I have been deeply engaged correcting proofs. Yet for weeks I have been looking forward immensely to your arrival! Immensely, dear child!" he repeated earnestly.

"Of course, Papa, I quite understand. And

anyhow here I am and all is well!"

"Yes," he agreed with evident relief, "that is the great thing, isn't it?" And then as Marica followed him into his study he turned and surveyed her with smiling criticism.

"You have grown, Marica! Let me see, how old

are you? Seventeen already?"

"Alas, no, Papa! I am quite an old thing! shall be nineteen next week!"

"Nineteen? You don't say so! Well, well-" and the sentence ended in an unknown tongue. Marica guessed that he was quoting reflections on the brevity of human life in Persian.

At dinner he was in one of his most charming moods, gay and witty as she had known him at times in the old days at Nice. Yet he was not the same as then for his eyes were dreamier and he had lost much of his arrogant intolerance. He would not speak of his illness since physical facts always repelled him, but he talked delightfully of his adventures in the Syrian desert.

Marica found herself once more under the spell of his mental atmosphere. His influence on her spirits was almost mesmeric. Now again for no particular

reason she suddenly felt light-hearted.

Yet the dinner was certainly not stimulating. To Marica, accustomed to the simple but pleasant dishes of the Continent it was a revelation in nastiness; but Mr. Fayne, apparently oblivious as ever to the needs of the body, ate uncomplainingly of everything that was put before him.

Afterwards as they sat over the fire in his study, Marica told him about her life in Geneva. But soon she noticed his eyes wandering restlessly towards the manuscripts on his writing-table. Denman had told her that he always worked late. She got up and

kissed him lightly on the forehead.

"Good-night, Papa!" "Good-night, my love!" Yet perhaps he felt he had chilled her for as she

reached the door he called to her.

"Marica! Your aunts are very anxious to make your acquaintance. They all three live together now in Queen's Gate. We must go as soon as possible to see them."

Marica smiled. She would try not to seem inappreciative of his rather pathetic effort to cheer her. Yet the prospect of a visit to three elderly aunts—two of whom she could not remember at all, whilst the third occupied a far from cheering place in her memory—was not exactly hilarious.

"Oh yes, Papa! And Lady Grundisburgh-shall

we see her too?"

"Are you anxious to see her?" her father asked in surprise.

"No-I was thinking of Anne."

"Ah yes! The girl. She must be just about your age. I was forgetting. Yes, we must go and see them later, but I believe just now they are away for Christmas. Well, good-night, my love! You must be tired after your journey!"

He turned again to his book with evident relief.

He turned again to his book with evident relief. Marica climbed the narrow stair up to the bedroom

that had been prepared for her.

Throwing up the sash of the window she looked out into the street below. The homely jingle of hansoms and the whirr of an infrequent taxi smote on her ear. Opposite someone was playing dance music on the piano. Through half-drawn curtains she could catch glimpses of cosy sitting-rooms where people sat round the fire and laughed and talked. Now and then an electric brougham glided past with a flashing vision of women in furs and jewels at the windows.

A sudden flood of loneliness and desolation came over Marica. Everyone around her had their own destination or appointed place. She alone had none. There was not a soul amongst these hurrying millions to whom she mattered. She might put on her hat again and walk out of the little red house and away to the end of the world without anyone caring what became of her. The quiet human spider in the library would go on weaving his webs of historical research in Buddhic calm, and dreary Sarah would imperturbably replace the blankets in the linen cupboard whence she took them. And the little house would go on just the same as if a four-wheeler had never driven up that afternoon and deposited Marica on the doorstep

And then Marica shook herself angrily and blinked back the tears that had risen to her eyes. It was absurd to be morbid one's first night amongst the "lights of London," the goal of all her youthful dreams! Life was full of possiblities and she was

quite sure she was going to be happy!

CHAPTER II.

But the aunts did not wait for Marica to be taken to call on them. The day after her arrival in London she came in from a short walk in the Park to find their cards on the hall-table. And Lady Plumpton's card, on which the mourning border was now dwindling into invisibility, bore a message for Mr. Fayne in pencil.

"We are sorry not to find Marica. Bring her to

tea on Sunday."

And so, on Sunday afternoon, Marica waited impatiently on the doorstep of 301 Queen's Gate, for an answer to the peal Mr. Fayne rang on the door bell. Perkins, the Aunts' imposing whiskered butler, attended by his two inevitable satellites, appeared on the threshold. Marica, wondering vaguely why it took three strong men to open one unresisting door, followed her father upstairs.

A scene of peace and plenty met her eye. At the end of the large blue drawing-room Lady Plumpton, in a magnificent gown of dark green patterned broché sat behind the immense silver urn which had been presented to Sir James ten years ago by the inhabitants of Jamaica. The tea-table was loaded with cakes and sandwiches of every description. On the white fur hearthrug the two fat dachshunds, Hans and Gretel, slumbered asthmatically. The sonorous singing of the urn blended peacefully with their stertorous breathing.

Lady Plumpton, with an elegant rustle of silk foundation and the tinkle of innumerable lockets rose

and came towards them.

"How are you, my dear Edward! And so this is Marica!" She presented her niece an ample cheek in greeting. "Louisa and Harriet will be here

soon. Harriet has not returned from a concert at the Albert Hall and Louisa is finishing off one of her

essays for the Theological Society."

She ended the sentence with a gentle laugh. Lady Plumpton did not claim an acute sense of humour—an attribute the late Governor of Jamaica had always strongly deprecated in woman—but she could never fail to realise the absurdity of Louisa wasting her time in speculation on problems with which only the masculine mind was qualified to deal. If Louisa wished to study questions of religion, why not consult their excellent friend Canon Burnleigh in the matter? As however Louisa's erudition was confined to wrestling with Paley in the privacy of the Queen's Gate library, Charlotte was able to condone it with a tolerant smile. Louisa, thank Heaven! had never joined the unsexed body of women at a university who clamour for the masculine adornment of a cap and gown!

Lady Plumpton was essentially a relic of the Victorian era. By this it must not be understood that the much abused term "early Victorian" applied to her. The early Victorian era—the day of crinolines and ringlets—had a charm and quaintness all its own, but it was to the period that came long after—the soul-destroying era of the royal fringe and bustle—that Lady Plumpton belonged. Her evolution ceased in 1890. Even in her attire she retained a late Victorian air, a netted bed of grey lichen still adorned her forehead, and voluminous folds at the back of her gowns replaced the departed glory of the "dress-

improver.''

Charlotte's marriage at the age of thirty-five to the elderly Sir James Plumpton, K.C.B., etc., Governor of Jamaica, had conferred on her none of that breadth of mind and worldly wisdom that matrimony is supposed miraculously to bestow. She still adhered to the rôle she had chosen to play through life—that of shrinking femininity—an attitude that contrasted oddly with her robust physique. It was this that had

captivated Sir James, whose want of prowess in athletics and insignificant appearance had been a lifelong grief to him, so that when a lady of Junoesque proportions flung herself on his protection at a garden party because a caterpillar fell into her tea from a bush, it was little wonder that he was aroused to a passionate devotion. The result of this was of course to confirm Charlotte in her rôle of sweet and helpless femininity, and she was never happier than when lamenting in gentle, yearning tones the increasing emancipation of woman.

"Your Aunt Louisa is terribly learned," she remarked, turning to Marica with a complacent sigh.

And at this moment Louisa herself came into the room. She turned a long bleak countenance towards her niece.

"Well, Marica!"

And Marica felt the sudden sharp contact of a bony cheek.

"She is just like a horse!" the girl thought as she returned the scrutiny of the cold eyes that looked at her critically through Louisa's spectacles.

"Harriet is late, Louisa!" remarked Charlotte as

she poured out the tea.

Louisa took a large silver watch attached to a black ribbon from her waistband. "It is only one minute

to five," she answered.

Louisa's watch could always be depended on to be perfectly accurate. Her whole scheme of life was tabulated; she did everything to the minute from the time she rose in the morning—punctually on being called—till ten o'clock at night, when on the stroke of the clock she removed her spectacles, drank a glass of cold water and retired to bed.

"Harriet is longing to meet Marica!" said Charlotte, "she was very sorry to have to go out this afternoon, but an old friend of ours begged her to go with her to hear Clara Butt. You remember dear old

Maria, don't you, Edward!"

"Lady Maria Buckenham, do you mean?"

"Yes. You as a boy knew her well. She is a very dear old friend of ours," Charlotte explained to Marica, "but she has certain peculiarities that strike strangers sometimes as odd. I always think it kinder to explain them."

"All the Buckenhams are eccentric," remarked Mr. Fayne, "Lady Amelia was quite extraordinary, I

remember."

"Oh yes, poor Amelia is now under control. But I hear she is very comfortable at Ticehurst," Charlotte said cheerfully. "Comfort" was to Charlotte's mind the one desideratum.

"Now Maria," she went on, "is not as peculiar as that. She has in fact only one marked peculiarity!"

"And what is that?" Marica could not refrain from

enquiring.

"Oh, quite a harmless one. She has a passion for collecting sugar. So if you see her empty the sugar basin into her bag, do not look surprised. Please appear to notice nothing! We always provide an extra sugar basin on purpose when she is coming. Oh, dear Maria!" she exclaimed sweetly, as at this moment the door opened and an old lady with a mummified face surmounted by a youthful flowery bonnet came into the room followed by Harriet.

Aunt Harriet must have been beautiful once, Marica reflected, as she sat down beside her on the sofa, and the girl noticed with relief a humorous twinkle in her

eyes.

"Well, Marica," she said, "are you glad to be back in London?"

"Yes, tremendously, Aunt Harriet!"

"And what sort of things do you like, I wonder? What are you most interested in?"

"People!" Marica answered briefly.

Louisa drew in her breath with a derisive hiss, as if Marica had expressed a predilection for black beetles.

"People!" she repeated witheringly.

"Well, why not?" Harriet asked quickly-an

enquiry to which Louisa vouchsafed no reply. Harriet being only fifty enjoyed that reputation for perpetual youth which is the doubtful blessing of the youngest, and was regarded by her elder sisters as a child—sharp, precocious, and at times amusing, but not to be taken seriously.

But Charlotte, who had overheard the conversation, turned to Marica and observed graciously:

"It will be very nice for you, my dear Marica, to get to know some really *nice* people. We must ask Mrs. Burnleigh to call on you. Mrs. Burnleigh is the wife of our dear Canon Burnleigh of St. Nathaniel's, you know!"

"Thank you very much!" Marica murmured.

"And one day I hope Marica will come with me to see my district!" remarked Louisa.

"And then perhaps she will join our Needlework

Guild!" suggested Charlotte.

"Perhaps she is fond of music! We might go to the Albert Hall together," said Harriet.

"I hope, Harriet," Louisa interposed before Marica could respond to all these plans for her edification, "that you will not encourage Marica to devote her whole time to amusement. One cannot sustain life on dessert!"

How like Papa! thought Marica—the same love of

similes that proved nothing.

"Still, Aunt Louisa," she could not refrain from remarking, "can one sustain it *entirely* on beefsteak? Surely a meal composed of nothing but solid nourishment would be rather oppressive?"

"And all the time," cried Harriet, before Louisa could frame a withering retort, "perhaps Marica does not care for concerts. Are you fond of music, my dear?"

At this point Mr. Fayne joined into the conversation.

"Marica, I am thankful to say," he remarked, "is quite unmusical."

"Why are you thankful, Edward?" Harriet asked curiously.

"Because I do not wish her senses to be trained

instead of her intellect."

"Her senses, Edward?"

"Yes. An ear for music is merely a highlydeveloped sense. It is the one so-called art that we share with animals. Many animals are musical. Cows, snakes, birds are often passionately fond of music—they have never been known to appreciate any other form of art-a picture for example. And no animal has ever been taught to draw or paint; yet many sing! The musical human being is on the same level; the nightingale and the 'prima donna' are actuated by precisely the same instinct. Neither has anything whatever to do with intellect."

"Who is to say the nightingale is not intellectual?"

suggested Harriet.

But Charlotte, who had no taste for the discussion of abstract topics brought the conversation back to the ground of more tangible fact by enquiring:

"Then you have never learnt to play and sing,

Marica?"

"Only a little. I should have loved it, but-"

"I have always held," Mr. Fayne interposed oratorically, "that the exquisite tortures young girls inflict on the nerves of sensitive people by practising the piano is in no way compensated for by their performances in after life. That is why I have never allowed Marica to devote much time to music. The pleasure she would be likely to give by the made talent is nothing to the pain she would have caused in the making!"

"Still," said Harriet, "Marica admits she plays a

little."

"Yes," Charlotte added cheerfully, "you must

play us one of your pieces, Marica!"

"I don't play pieces, I only sing, and really, Aunt Charlotte, I don't know anything good enough to sing to you."

"My dear child, any little ballad will give us

pleasure. Now pray begin!"

Marica sat down reluctantly on the music stool. At the pension she had sometimes amused her companions with Italian popular songs picked up from the strolling minstrels that patrol the Riviera, and had learnt from them some of the folk songs of their countries. But her repertoire included nothing suitable to sing to Lady Plumpton. Oh, why had she never learnt "When the swallows homeward fly," or some other "drawing-room song," such as the two English girls had sung in the evenings?

Meanwhile the three aunts sat in dignified silence waiting for her to begin. The silence must be broken at all costs. Hurriedly she struck a few chords and broke into the first thing that occurred to her—the little French nursery song that the girls at the pension

sang over their needlework.

"Marianne s'en allait au moulin Marianne s'en allait au moulin! C'était pour y mouler son grain C'était pour y mouler son grain! Elle était sur son âne La petite Mam'selle Marianne Elle était sur son âne Martin En allant au moulin!"

Harriet smiled as the long history of the donkey's subsequent adventures ended and Marica returned to her chair.

"Charming, my dear, you have a very pretty voice!"

But from Charlotte and Louisa no applause was forthcoming. Louisa frankly detested music. Charlotte's silence resulted, however, from a different cause—she felt convinced that the song was improper. She understood very little French, having always been too shocked by French literature to keep up by reading the small knowledge of the language she had

acquired in the schoolroom. This song with its clipped vowels and rapid intonation contained, she felt certain, some subtle double entente. As Marica's only married aunt she felt it her duty to give the girl the benefit of her superior knowledge of the world.

"You have quite a good voice, my dear," she said, smoothly, "but it is a pity not to learn some really nice songs. A young girl cannot be too careful what impression she creates, and singing risqué French

songs after dinner will do her no good.'

"Risqué songs?" Marica repeated aghast. "But

really, Aunt Charlotte-"

She had only feared the little rhyme would be considered childish—that anyone could, by the wildest stretch of imagination, consider it improper had never for a moment occurred to her.

"Yes, really, my dear Charlotte-" Harriet

chimed in uncontrollably.

"Enough!" said Lady Plumpton, raising a white wadded hand to enforce silence. She was not accustomed to having her dicta questioned in this way. In Jamaica any drawing-room performer had stood or fallen according to Lady Plumpton's opinion. And the fact that she was so unsure of the grounds for her objections made her all the more anxious to put an end to the discussion. "Believe me, my dear Marica, I speak only for your good. And now perhaps you would like me to give you a song?"
"Oh, certainly, thank you very much!" Marica

answered in surprise.

The idea of the placid mass of prose behind the tea urn suddenly bursting into song was startingly incongruous.

Apparently it struck Mr. Fayne in the same light. "My dear Charlotte!" he remarked incredulously, "I was not aware that you possessed this accomplishment!"

"Nor was I until quite lately!" Charlotte answered, nodding her head triumphantly, "it was only a few months ago that I discovered it. Of course I have always had a rather remarkable ear for music, and as a young girl I sometimes felt I had a talent for it. But my life was so full of other interests that I had no time to devote to it. And then a little while ago an Italian lady—a friend of dear Canon Burnleigh's came to call on us. She was very musical, and told me she was so fond of some of our English ballads. I offered to sing her one—I think it was 'The last rose of summer.' I sang it quite simply-little thinking of the effect it would produce! To my astonishment Signora Fragolini's eyes filled with tears; 'Oh, madame!' she exclaimed, 'are you really not aware that you have a wonderful gift! a marvellous gift! a voice of crystal! A glorious voice! You must cultivate this wonderful gift. madame!' And then the good creature offered to teach me herself! It appears—by a strange coincidence—that she had from time to time given singing lessons in her native land—as a special favour of course-and she was kind enough to offer to do the same for me! I feel I owe her untold gratitude."

"Still," Harriet remarked drily, "you paid her

extremely well, Charlotte!"

"A small return for the service she rendered me. But now I will sing a little song for Marica's benefit."

Rising majestically from the sofa Lady Plumpton swept across the room to the piano. She sat down with elaborate care, her silken skirts billowing over the small music-stool on all sides, and after striking a few resounding chords, broke suddenly into a sonorous boom.

Her selection was "Che faró?" which she delivered in a voice like a fog-horn, rising from time to time into a hoot of knife-like sharpness that rent the air. It was excruciating.

If Orpheus really yelled like that! thought Marica, her tympana quivering at the furious onslaught of sound, how thankful Eurydice must have felt that he left her!

She was picturing the forsaken maiden cowering

with her hands over her ears in the depths of Hades when the song ended and a grateful silence fell upon the room.

Breathless and flushed with satisfied artistic fervour Lady Plumpton rose from the music-stool and sat down again on the sofa. A triumphant radiance illuminated her countenance as she looked around for applause. It came—haltingly.

"Thank you, Charlotte," said Harriet.
"Thank you very much," murmured Marica.

"Thank you, my dear Charlotte, how very charming!" quavered Lady Maria.

But Mr. Fayne, whose social tact never deserted

him, proved more equal to the occasion.

"My dear Charlotte," he said politely, "what an immense pleasure this talent must be to you! How

very delightful for you."

Marica had never admired him more than at that moment. It is easy to be pleasant and insincere, but sometimes to combine truth with perfect politeness is only within the power of genius.

Lady Plumpton glowed with appreciation.

"Thank you, Edward, I am so glad you think so! It is, as you say, an immense pleasure. And yet," she went on yearningly, "how sad to think of all the wasted years! To have been all one's life in possession of such a gift and not to have known it! If only I had discovered it long ago! What pleasure I might have been able to give to hundreds! And poor Sir James too! He was so fond of Scotch songs—I might have sung them to him in the evenings!"

Marica coughed violently. The vision that rose before her eyes of Aunt Charlotte shouting "The bonnie banks of Loch Lomond" at the somnolent

Governor was too much for her.

Lady Plumpton was just turning towards her in alarm, about to offer her a jujube when a sudden diversion occurred in the opposite direction. Lady Maria had seized this moment to empty the sugar basin. Profiting by the fact that she was momentarily left out of the conversation she had opened her black velvet bag and was furtively conveying the sugar bit by bit into its interior.

"Take no notice!" whispered Lady Plumpton.
"Poor dear, she likes to think she has not been

detected."

And indeed the little old lady's face was wrinkled into a hundred lines of cunning satisfaction as she closed the bag and glanced out of the corner of her eyes at the empty sugar-bowl.

CHAPTER III.

THE kindly aunts lost no time in carrying out their plans for Marica's welfare. Nearly every day a message arrived from Queen's Gate inviting her to go out with one of them; Louisa devised intellectual treats in the form of visits to old churches, lectures at the Royal Society, or debates at the Pandora Club, whilst Harriet less resolutely instructive took Marica to the Tower of London or the Academy—forms of amusement that the girl found almost frivolous by comparison with Louisa's programme, and rendered still more exhilarating by Harriet's buoyant sense of humour.

"I always feel I am more like an old bachelor than an old maid!" she said one day to Marica—and the phrase exactly described her. Aunt Harriet, one felt instinctively, had no romance laid away in lavender, she was just a cheery "good sort" with an alert intelligence, but like the rest of the Faynes untroubled

by any of the ordinary human emotions.

Afternoons spent with Aunt Charlotte were of a more restful order. Sometimes Marica, looking out of the drawing-room window, would see Blundell, Lady Plumpton's coachman, checking the somnambulistic progress of two fat and elderly carriage horses before the door of 52 Blenheim Gardens, the well-fed Alfred would descend from the box to ring the bell and the next moment Denman entered with the message that "her Ladyship" had called to take Miss Marica for a drive.

Slowly the barouche crawled round the Park whilst Lady Plumpton discoursed in gentle tones of what a really "nice girl" should or should not do.

"Of course, my dear, you will tell Denman only to say 'at home' to lady callers. It would never do

for you to receive gentlemen when your father is not

at home."

"But I don't know a single man in London," Marica answered with a smile at the thought of how singularly unfraught with danger was her life in this direction.

"Still, you will meet many later in society. Then another thing, Marica, you will be sure not to walk alone anywhere but in Kensington. You could not possibly be seen in Bond Street without a maid."

"But I have no maid, Aunt Charlotte!"

"You must engage one—we must see about that later. Meanwhile you must take Sarah. And then about clothes, Marica. You have an allowance, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, Papa has always given me money just

when I wanted it," she answered vaguely.

It had been part of Mr. Fayne's "system" that she should never acquire the "money sense." "The one way to prevent a child thinking about money is to give it as much as it wants," was his curious argument. And somehow in Marica's case it had succeeded—money said nothing to her at all. Her tastes were of the simplest, but when she wanted a thing she bought it regardless of the cost.

But Aunt Charlotte, to whom the keeping of accounts was almost a part of her religion, gave vent to an exclamation of horror.

"My dear Marica! Then you have really no idea how much you spend?"

Marica shook her head.

Lady Plumpton glanced at the slim figure in blue serge at her side with an enquiring eye.

"Now how much did you pay for that coat and

skirt for example?"

Marica reflected. "I'm afraid I really can't quite remember, but I think it was about three hundred francs. What is that? About twelve pounds, isn't it? I saw it in a shop window in Bond Street and

loved it immediately. It is a darling, isn't it?" she

added gaily.

But Lady Plumpton, to whom the science of "line" was totally unintelligible, answered in outraged tones:

"My dear child, you were abominably cheated! Blue serge is quite a cheap material. You would get one just as good at Marvin and Diggles for five

guineas!"

"I did go there," Marica said, remembering the display with which that emporium of late Victorian respectability had filled her. "Aunt Louisa took me there one day to buy a hat, but—" she paused with a shudder.

"Well, and what was wrong with their hats?"

Aunt Charlotte enquired.

"They looked as if they had been made by a carpenter! So many English hats do, I think," Marica answered.

"Made by a carpenter? My dear child, what can

"Oh, don't you know? Not blown together like a hat ought to be, but hard and firm with bows hammered into place. And the frocks in the window were just as uncompromising!"

"At least they are ladylike!" Lady Plumpton said reprovingly. "I trust, Marica, you will not adopt

the present unfeminine style of dressing."

She looked down at her own brocaded bosom complacently. Lady Plumpton was one of those happy people who are endowed from birth with the soothing consciousness that everything belonging to them is quite perfect. From the moment she took up her abode at 301 Queen's Gate, that quite unaspiring mansion became immediately the one and only house any reasonable being could wish to inhabit. Blundell and the barouche were the only conditions in which it was possible to enjoy a drive in the Park; Dawkins was the only maid to be regarded with implicit confidence; dachshunds were the only dogs worthy of a place on the drawing-room hearthrug. And consequently Lady Plumpton's clothes represented the only style of dressing possible to self-respecting womanhood. That anything could exist in more perfect taste than her dark green brocaded silk gown trimmed with coffee-coloured lace, or the imposing battlemented bonnet that surmounted it, never for a moment occurred to her. Marica at twenty, must naturally be content to dress more plainly; but Lady Plumpton's irreproachable style might be modified to meet her requirements.

"In future, my dear, you must let me advise you,"

she remarked graciously.

And Marica could only murmur: "Thank you very much, Aunt Charlotte."

A few days later, when Marica was at tea with the aunts in Queen's Gate, Lady Plumpton remarked:

"By the way, Marica, have you done anything yet about a maid? You must really have someone to walk out with."

"If I had a maid, would she say 'Good-morning' when she called me?"

Lady Plumpton looked uncomprehending. "What

a strange question, Marica!"

"Well, you see, it's like this, Aunt Charlotte," Marica said impulsively. "Abroad, whoever calls one in the morning, always says 'Bonjour, Mademoiselle!' Antonie would never dream of not saying 'Guten Morgen.' And of course one says it too. It seems so bleak to have one's morning tea deposited by one's bed in stony silence. So of course the first time Sarah called me I said, 'Good-morning!' but she looked so offended I've never dared to say it again!"

"It is not the custom in England," Aunt Harriet explained with a laugh, "and English servants usually resent anything they are not accustomed to. I had a maid once who gave notice because I didn't wear false hair. She said she had always been accustomed

to ladies with hair she could take away at night to brush, and seemed to feel I was not playing fair by keeping mine on my head. Probably Sarah has never been said good-morning to and therefore didn't understand it."

"The point is," interposed Lady Plumpton, putting a stop to what she considered a frivolous discussion, "the point is that Marica requires a maid to walk out with her. A nice sensible elderly maid—like Dawkins for example."

"I have never seen Dawkins!" said Marica,

shaking her head with a smile.

"What, my dear, you have never yet seen our dear Dawkins? You must make her acquaintance at once! Dawkins, my dear Marica, is our treasure, she has been with us twenty years. I cannot imagine what we should do without her."

"Hum-m," said Harriet, smiling.
"What did you say, Harriet?"
"Oh, nothing, my dear Charlotte!"

Lady Plumpton moved towards the fireplace and rang the upstairs bell, and in a few moments the "treasure" made her appearance in answer to the summons. Standing before her mistress with her plump hands clasped on the ledge formed by the lower portion of her person, her second chin resting upon the Cairngorm brooch presented to her some years ago as a token of esteem by the late Governor of Jamaica, Dawkins appeared truly emblematic of the prosperity that reigned at 301 Queen's Gate. It was an understood thing that Dawkins was, as Lady Plumpton had said, indispensable to the welfare of the household. Nobody knew exactly in what way, but the tradition remained. That Dawkins was conscious of her worth there could be no doubt whatever as she stood awaiting Lady Plumpton's explanation of the summons.

"Dawkins," Lady Plumpton began in the pleasant conciliatory voice she always used in speaking to the "treasure," "Dawkins, this is Miss Marica, Mr.

Edward's daughter. Miss Marica wants a maid. Do you know of anyone suitable?"

Dawkins pursed up her lips and fixed her eyes upon

the cornice.

"There is Jane Botwell, Milady-out of place now

Mrs. Partingly is under restraint."

"Mrs. Partingly—ah! Archdeacon Partingly's wife who has been off her head for years!" Harriet remarked.

"Yes, Mum."

"Is Jane Botwell a suitable age, Dawkins?" asked Lady Plumpton.

"Oh, yes, Milady, Jane Botwell is quite elderly."

"But her health is good?"

"She suffers at times with nervous dyspepsia and her hearing is not what it used to be. Still that doesn't trouble her. And she sees well—with glasses."

A sudden spasm convulsed Marica's shoulders. She rose abruptly to her feet and coughed sharply

into her pocket-handkerchief.

"Ah, Aunt Charlotte, I am so sorry—I must rush away! I have just remembered an appointment at my dressmaker's."

Lady Plumpton looked surprised. "Then Daw-

kins will let you know about Jane Botwell-"

"Oh, thank you so much! Good-bye, Aunt Charlotte."

She hurried from the room but outside the door Harriet overtook her. Marica turned and clasped

Harriet's arm convulsively.

"Oh, Aunt Harriet! I couldn't hold out another moment! Couldn't you picture Jane Botwell? The elderly, spectacled, deaf, dyspeptic ex-maid of a mad archdeaconess to be perpetually attached to one's person—"

A storm of laughter shook her and communicating itself to Harriet, aunt and niece sobbed in each other's

arms on the landing.

"Sh-sh-" whispered Harriet between the spasms,

"Charlotte will hear us! But seriously, Marica," she went on, recovering herself, "you must have a maid. Why not get someone cheerful through an advertisement?"

"I will! I'll advertise for a French maid. Aunt Harriet, I must have someone I can say Good morn-

ing to!"

The next day, Marica's requirements having been announced in the *Morning Post*, French maids of all shapes and sizes arrived at Blenheim Gardens. By five o'clock Marica sat at the tea-table wondering on whom her choice should fall when Denman entered and announced the arrival of still another applicant.

"Show her up!" said Marica wearily.

A moment later the door opened and a woman came into the room leading a shaggy dog by a string.

"Bonjour, Mademoiselle!"

"Bonjour!"

"Mademoiselle permits that Balzac enters?"

"Balzac? Is Balzac your dog's name?" asked Marica with interest. Balzac was the oddest looking dog she had ever seen outside a toy-shop. He might have walked straight off a green stand on which he was intended to be pulled over a nursery floor. His white woolly coat—beautifully clean and well brushed—was not unlike a Newfoundland's, whilst the black flapping spaniel ears framed a piquant little terrier face. His large black eyes—really his only beautiful feature—held an impatient worried expression that was curiously human.

"Mademoiselle is fond of dogs!" the maid said in French, nodding her head sagaciously.

Marica looked up at her face. Where had she seen it before? Those beetling brows and the grimly smiling mouth were somehow familiar.

"Mademoiselle has forgotten Léontine!"

Suddenly in a flash it all came back to her; she saw again the *tricoteuse* who had stood beside Lady Sophie Brinton's dressing table at the "Hotel des

Têtes Couronnées "with the blue background of Lac Leman behind her.

"Ah yes, of course I remember!"

"And I, I have never forgotten Mademoiselle and what she said about dogs. Mademoiselle said she loved all dogs-that is why I am here to-day."

"I don't understand. Please explain."

"Mademoiselle, it is like this. I left Milady's a few weeks ago-it was because Mademoiselle Cynthia had the habit of throwing me things at the headcela a fini par m'embêter!

Marica smiled, Cynthia had this playful way at

the pension when annoyed.

"Donc," Léontine resumed, "on my departure Milady made me a present of Balzac."

"Surely Balzac is not one of Lady Sophie's prize Bhutias?"

"No, Mademoiselle, it is just that. Balzac is the result of an unfortunate indiscretion on the part of "Toti," the terrier Mademoiselle admired at Ĝeneva. Milady dismissed the kennel maid and desired to have Balzac drowned, but I begged to be allowed to keep him."

The woolly dog, evidently understanding that he was being spoken of, huddled himself up against his companion's dress and blinked self-consciously.

"But now, Mademoiselle," Léontine went on tragically, "the misfortune is this, that with Balzac I cannot find a situation! No lady will receive him into her house. It is that which hurts!" and stooping hastily she picked up the little dog and pressed him to her heart.

"Suddenly I see the announcement of Mademoiselle in the Morning Post," she continued, "I remember what Mademoiselle said about loving all dogs, and I tell myself perhaps Mademoiselle will engage me and permit me to have Balzac with me. Mademoiselle, I cannot part from Balzac!" she cried with tears in her eyes.

Marica looked at her wonderingly. What was she

to say? When Léontine first entered the room, the girl had felt at once the impossibility of engaging her—one could not invite a woman like the spirit of the French Revolution incarnate to make a part of a well-ordered English household. What would Aunt Charlotte say at finding her in the place destined for the respectable Jane Botwell? But now as Marica encountered the tearful grey eyes she wondered why she had ever thought Léontine like a tricoteuse. The murderous look had entirely vanished from features, and an expression of angelic tenderness took its place as she looked down at the little dog's woolly head. Balzac, who till this moment had retained his air of weary boredom, now at the tremulous note in his mistress's voice moved restlessly as if annoyed by her display of emotion. Suddenly one of the tears that had gathered in Léontine's eyes overflowed and fell with a splash on to the tip of his black retroussé nose. At this he quickly raised his head, administered a brusque lick to her chin and then sighed deeply. The action suggested nothing of the traditional dog's pathetic power of sympathy but rather the impatience of a man who hates a scene.
"What an extraordinary dog!" Marica murmured.

"Oh, Mademoiselle," Léontine cried earnestly, "but Balzac is not a dog!" And in an inward voice she added, shaking her head mysteriously, "Ce n'est pas un chien—c'est quelqu'un!"

"You think he is a re-incarnation?"

But Léontine, unversed in the phraseology of esoteric Buddhism, could only repeat in a voice of inward conviction, "C'est quelqu'un!"
"He is certainly very human."

"Oh, Mademoiselle, that is why I named him Balzac. It is because he understand everythingtoute la comèdie humaine! He knows always what one feels—one does not have to speak. Mademoiselle, I could not part from Balzac—rather would I die of hunger!"

"There is surely no question of that?"

- "I have still ten shillings left, Mademoiselle."
- "Only ten shillings in the world? But how is that?"
- "Ma foi, Mademoiselle, but it is a month already that I look for a place. Twenty ladies would engage me but they would not receive Balzac. When they say that, je file!" In a flash the *tricoteuse* reappeared behind Léontine's resentful features.
 - "And if I say it too?" Marica asked with a smile.

"Mademoiselle will not say it!" Léontine cried passionately, "Mademoiselle has the heart too good! Mademoiselle has said that she loves all dogs—" She paused to draw breath, and Balzac took the opportunity to give vent to a loud yawn of frenzied exasperation at this protracted dialogue.

Marica broke into a little ripple of laughter. Her mind was made up now. She could not turn this curious couple from the door—let Aunt Charlotte say what she liked! Nor was it pity alone that prompted her decision. She felt she wanted them. The little grey house was so desolate in its immunity from all emotion—no one cared for anyone; the servants, well regulated machines, went about their work with unquestioning indifference, whilst Mr. Fayne remained serenely oblivious to their existence. But with Léontine and Balzac a new element would be brought into this frigid atmosphere. The desert would blossom with a little rose of love, and though it was only the love of a French maid for a woolly dog it would be better than nothing all the same.

"Léontine!" Marica said impulsively, "I will engage you and Balzac. You had better go and fetch your box at once."

Léontine gave a cry of joy. "Ah, merci, merci, Je servirai Mademoiselle jusqu'au dernier soupir! But," she added seriously, "Mademoiselle must ask for my references. Milady is in Paris—Mademoiselle must write to her before she engages me."

"But you and Balzac can't live on ten shillings

meanwhile. No, you must come now. And I'll

write to Lady Sophie."

And so that night Léontine and Balzac with their respective trunks—a large tin one and a tiny leather portmanteau containing Balzac's belongings—came to stay at Blenheim Gardens. A week later Marica received an answer to her letter to Lady Sophie.

"Dear Miss Fayne," said the sprawling handwriting, "of course I remember you at Geneva! Do take Léontine, she is an excellent creature and Cynthia treated her abominably. Go and see that naughty girl at 400 Grosvenor Square one day.—

Yours very sincerely, Sophie Brinton."

But Mr. Fayne, when Marica recounted the incident

to him, listened with nervous amusement.

"Your Aunt Charlotte will never forgive you!" he said, smiling dreamily, "there is nothing in the world she enjoys so much as advising people about how to manage their houses. You will have to be very careful how you break it to her, that you have

disregarded her advice."

It was evident that he felt genuinely distressed at the reflection. Edward Fayne was curiously nervous of Lady Plumpton. The power of matter over mind is a very real one. Large, capable, matter-of-fact people with no imaginations have often a strangely paralysing effect upon dreamers. Lady Plumpton had a way of asking searching questions on practical matters which threw Mr. Fayne into a state of helpless bewilderment.

"Did you say you have your meat from Lidgrove's or the Stores?" she would enquire suddenly. And Mr. Fayne, obliged to confess that he had not the remotest idea where the meat came from, was brought

to a sudden realisation of his shortcomings.

"You will not only have to tell Aunt Charlotte," he said, looking apprehensively at Marica across the dinner table, "that you refuse to have Jane Botwell; you have also got to tell her you have engaged a Frenchwoman. And Aunt Charlotte distrusts all

French people. It is almost part of her religion to do so. And as to 'Balzac'——''

"Do you think Aunt Charlotte has ever heard of

Balzac, Papa? One can't imagine somehow her having read Contes Drolatiques."

Aunt Charlotte was indeed the most complete ingénue it had ever been Marica's lot to meet. The girls at the Pension des Tilleuls familiar-as she herself had been from infancy-with science and the classics, had read books of which the mere mention would have tinted Lady Plumpton pink to the tips of her large ear-lobes. Marica herself, on referring one day in conversation to a life of Madame de Maintenan she had just finished reading, met with a horrified stare of amazement from Aunt Charlotte's innocent green eyes.

"My dear Marica, how quite too dreadful that you should read such books!"

"But why not?"

"Books about those wicked French women!"

"But Madame de Maintenon wasn't wicked, was she? She had a very good influence over Louis XIV---'

"Hush, hush, Marica, we will not discuss that," exclaimed Aunt Charlotte now blushing fiercely. "No good could possibly come out of such a shockingly irregular state of affairs—"

"But Aunt Charlotte it wasn't irregular-they were married!" Marica cried desperately.

And the relief that settled on Lady Plumpton's features was almost pathetic to behold.

"Why, of course, my dear, I had forgotten for the moment. I was thinking of Madame de Sevigné."

Marica, smiling, forbore from enlightening her The French women of history all occupied indiscriminately the same place in Lady Plumpton's mind. The less one knew about them the better, she considered.

It was therefore not to be expected that she should

hear of the arrival of Léontine and Balzac without remonstrance.

Marica, having carefully thought out the most tactful way of breaking the news to her, found herself when it came to the point announcing it without preamble. The diplomatic phrases she had prepared seemed suddenly to desert her, and in answer to Lady Plumpton's enquiry: "Well, my dear Marica, and have you yet seen Jane Botwell?" she answered with cheerful abruptness:

"No, thank you, Aunt Charlotte, I engaged a

French maid yesterday."

And then before Lady Plumpton could recover from her surprise, at her advice being thus calmly disregarded, Marica bade her an affectionate farewell and hurried away.

CHAPTER IV.

THE weeks went slowly by in the little house in Blenheim Gardens. Now that the first excitement of finding herself in London had subsided a new loneliness settled on Marica. Where were the affinities she had dreamt of meeting in this huge bewildering city? People who live in solitary places are wont to imagine that town life means the companionship of one's fellow-men, yet one may be as completely "out of it" in London as in a country cottage five miles from the station where the Daily Mail arrives at tea-time.

That London contained affinities Marica felt convinced. Of course there were ugly, dreary people to be met at every turn, yet nowhere in her wanderings about Europe had she ever caught glimpses of such charming men and women as she saw here and there in the grey streets of London; at the street corners, from the windows of cabs, one saw them, these tantalizing visions, eyes that met her own with kindly interest, pretty girls leading pet dogs; lean, sunburnt men with weather-beaten faces—people who looked alive and joyous, yet who, for want of a few mumbled words of introduction, must remain for ever strangers to one. If only one could throw conventionality to the winds and hail them joyfully as soul to soul!

"Papa," of course, could not enter into her feelings, any interest in humanity he construed as a silly craving for "society," and since the first evening she had never made the mistake of confiding in him.

The only person who understood was Léontine. Ever since Balzac's reception in Blenheim Gardens the tricoteuse had vanished entirely from Léontine's

countenance, and she waited on Marica with all the fervour of devotion of which her race is capable.

One evening as she dressed Marica in the plain high-up frock she wore for dinner, Léontine sighed deeply and remarked: "And Mademoiselle who amuses herself not at all! Mademoiselle who has no amies égayantes! At her age, Mademoiselle should be leading la vie rieuse!"

"La vie rieuse, Léontine?"

"Ah, it was Mademoiselle Cynthia who led the vie rieuse!" Léontine said, nodding her head sagaciously, "the ball, the opera, the 'courses'! If only Mademoiselle could be gay like that!"

"Do you want me to be gay, Léontine?"

"But certainly, Mademoiselle, on n'est jeune qu'

une fois. Faut bien en profiter!"

But the glory of youth is never to realise its own ephemerality. At twenty one has often had enough of it. Marica thought of her life at the Château du Loup, at the Villa des Tilleuls—what good had youth been to her?

"I think being young is rather an over-rated amusement!" she said with a little sigh, and went downstairs.

After dinner in the drawing-room, Mr. Fayne fell asleep in his chair, and Marica, with Léontine's words sounding in her ears, watched him with a passionate "La vie rieuse . . le bal . . . l'opéra . . . " how splendid to want nothing of all that, to be able to sleep the evening hours away—those hours that out of all the twenty-four call loudest to the heart of vouth!

The chorus of human revelry was at its height; London was awake, this was the hour when its pulse beat fastest; when the tide of life surged strongest through its brilliant thoroughfares. Outside the little red house the streets were ablaze with light; the restaurants emitted crowds of revellers; the theatres stood open to receive them, and the pavements swarmed with happy toilers liberated from the day's work to snatch a few brief hours of pleasure. London's play hour had come round again and she could take no part in it, could only sit in silence and curse the ardour of youth that possessed her. Oh! to be old, "when desire faileth," when to sit in a comfortable arm-chair and dose the hours away would be the only craving that possessed one, to be too deaf to long for music, too rheumatic to wish to dance, too worn out to care for anything but rest!

There were long hours when she sat alone, browsing at the book-case in her little sitting-room, which contained the only friends who, she felt, really understood her. The top shelf held the dearest—books she had brought with her from abroad—whose well-worn backs were like familiar faces smiling at her. Emerson, strong and sane and humorous; Epictetus, with a little gem of thought for every mundane perplexity; Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, Browning, Heine, Maeterlinck, a varied collection but all vivid, alive and human—fires at which to warm herself when the craving for companionship overcame her! One must be very lonely to understand all that books can be to one.

And then sometimes, tired with reading, she would stand and look out of the window at the little street below, watching the people pass by. She found a good deal of mild amusement in watching the neighbours' movements. Everyone else, she noticed. seemed always to be going somewhere. The family of red-haired girls next door would drive off gaily in taxi-cabs waving farewells to the windows; the young man with no chin and no forehead who lived opposite started out nightly in an overcoat and muffler to dine; every evening the sprightly lady at the corner house drifted into her electric brougham-a fleeting vision of chiffon and diamonds-and was whirled away to some festive scene. Even the areas disgorged happy maidservants going off to spend their "evenings out." Broughams, cabs, motors, dashed past the windows just as they had done the first evening and still Marica gazed at them from her lonely point of vantage envying them their place in the scheme of things. When would she too come out and play her

part in the whirl of life?

The night when the people at the big corner house gave a dance was almost more than she could bear. Marica loved dancing. At the pension she had always been the leader of the soirées dansantes, and even at the Nice gymnase the professeur de danse would point her out as his show pupil. Ah, she could dance-she knew that! And as the sound of the tuning-up violins floated out into the spring air her feet tingled with the desire to glide again over the parqueterie to the sound of waltz music. Jumping out of bed she ran to the window and drew aside the curtain. Down below she saw the stream of carriages: gaily dressed women flitted across the pavement to the light that streamed from the open front door; up above, the little balcony was wreathed in brightlycoloured lamps, and through the windows one could catch a glimpse of the ballroom illumined by a blaze of electric lights where the dancers floated round to the sounds of the string band. The girl, watching from the windows across the street, could see it all, quite plainly, women with white shoulders and diamonds in their hair, men with sleek heads and shining collars-round and round they went. It was agony to watch them and she climbed back into bed with rage at her heart. For hours she lay awake staring into the darkness. She was not in the least tired, and her lithe young limbs beneath the sheets ached not for rest but for motion. Oh, to be over there, just fifty yards away, dancing to the strains of that perfectly delirious waltz tune that floated in at the window. Tears of longing rose to her eyes and then with a determined effort she choked them back, drew the sheets over her ears to shut out the seductive sounds and fell asleep.

One morning Mr. Fayne, having finished his

breakfast, turned on his way to the door and with one of his rare and beautiful smiles, asked gently: "My love, would you like to go out with me this afternoon?"

Of course she would like it! The charm that his society held for her had never lost its power, and though in the matter of "treats" her tastes were never consulted, the mere fact of being with him gave her a curious intellectual pleasure. He was so fine, so subtle, so splendidly removed from the commonplaceness of the world around him. And when they visited the mummies in the British Museum, or prehistoric skeletons in South Kensington, or wandered round the gardens at Kew, he became once more the delightful companion he had been in the old days at Nice when they went out for rambles together in the mountains.

Amongst other things he was deeply interested in zoology, and had lately been reading certain articles in the *Spectator* on the senses of smell and hearing amongst wild animals; so the girl was not surprised when he exclaimed with sudden eagerness: "Marica, we will go to the Zoo this afternoon!"

"Oh, yes, Papa, that would be glorious!"

After lunch they drove off to Regent's Park. Mr. Fayne entered the gardens smiling serenely; in one hand he carried a flute, in the other a large bottle of Pivert's "Trèfle Incarnat," and a bundle of cotton wool.

"Do tell me what that is for, Papa?" Marica asked curiously.

"The scent? Oh, for the lions."

"Do you think they will like 'Trefle'?"

"I don't know. That is what I want to see. So many people have tried them with lavender water that they are no doubt tired of it so I asked for the strongest scent obtainable and the chemist suggested 'trèfle.' It is certainly strangely unpleasant."

But apparently the lions were weary of experiments on their taste in perfumes for instead of rolling over in ecstasy, as certain zoologists had discovered they were wont to do, they remained bored and indifferent whilst the wet wads of violently-scented cotton wool

hurtled at them through the bars.

The serpents were more appreciative of the experiments on their sense of hearing, and in response to Mr. Fayne's performance on the flute waved their heads to and fro like an uneducated audience at a village concert. Without a smile on his sad ascetic features he drew forth weird wailing notes, peacefully oblivious to the wondering comments from the increasing crowd that followed his progress.

In the "small cats' house" an unexpected develop-

In the "small cats' house" an unexpected development awaited them. Mr. Fayne, undaunted by the appalling odour, had penetrated to the cage of the "ring-tailed coati" when a sudden excitement seemed to possess the little creature, who sprang at the bars of the cage and held out a black paw, trembling with

eagerness, towards the visitors.

"It is the trèfle he smells, Papa!"
"True. He appears to like it."

"I suppose if one inhabited the 'small cats' house' even 'trèfle' would be welcome—oh, look how he loves it!"

For the "coati" in an ecstasy of delight had seized the piece of scented wool held out to him and was rapturously dabbing it on to every inch of his long tail, sniffing eagerly from time to time to find out whether he had succeeded in imparting the perfume to the fur.

"I am so glad we made him happy!" murmured Mr. Fayne, wandering out again, "we must come often and bring him things to scent his tail with.

And now for the monkeys, Marica!"

They had reached the small building which contains the choicest specimens of monkeyhood, and their entrance was greeted by deafening hoots proceeding from a Hoolock Gibbon that swung gaily by its tail from the top of its cage. Close by, crouching upon the floor, sat a baboon clasping its head as if in

acute mental anguish. A world of suffering was in its

weary eyes.

"It suffers precisely as I do in hotels!" remarked Mr. Fayne, looking at it sympathetically. "You remember the screaming woman overhead in Milan?"

Marica gave a little bubble of laughter. "Oh, Papa, you mean Marigiani?" She remembered well the famous "prima donna" who trilled exquisitely every morning—to Marica's joy and her father's despair. "She wasn't quite as bad as the gibbon was she, Papa?"

"I can imagine nothing more excruciating!"

The gibbon, having apparently satisfied its need of self-expression, suddenly ceased its joyous shouts and with a single bound, light as Pavlova, descended on to the floor of his cage.

"Wasn't that exquisite, Marica? But now let us find the keeper to take us down below. I believe there is a wonderful young chimpanzee they keep

there."

The keeper was delighted to exhibit his specimens and led them down into the basement where the infant prodigy was lodged. But at the door of the room the strangest sight met their eyes. Leaning his back against the window ledge there stood a young man in a perfectly-cut morning coat with one arm thrown nonchalantly around a frightful chimpanzee whose head, covered with red scrub like hair, rested affectionately on his shoulder. The attitude was one of such complete repose as to suggest that the couple had been standing like this for some time, and the blue eyes of the young man—smiling and serene as the sea when it first breaks on one's sight over the white sand-hills—spoke of perfect contentment at the situation.

As she looked at him Marica experienced a sudden thrill of interest; never in her life had she encountered a face that appealed to her so powerfully. It was the "glorious morning face" of which Stevenson wrote! The fleeting visions of affinities caught through cab windows and at street corners had sketchily suggested possibilities, but here was the ideal embodied!

Yet he was not extraordinarily handsome. His features indeed were far from Apollonic, but his lean well-bred face reddened with the sun, his bleached hair and moustache and strong white teeth had such an air of wholesome freshness—he looked so clean and "cared for"! And when he smiled, as he took a banana out of a paper bag and held it out towards the monkey, laughing lines broke out around his eyes—kindly crowsfeet that spoke of much contentment with the world.

Ah, why didn't she know him? Why couldn't he have been one of Aunt Charlotte's acquaintances?

At the sight of the new arrivals he seemed to wake as from a reverie, and gently detaching the chimpanzee's head from his shoulder, he said with a sigh: "Well, my dear, I must be trekking. I'll bring you some cherries one of these days. And now, Goodbye, old girl."

The monkey with a whimper sprang again towards him but he pushed her laughingly away and strolled towards the door.

"Wonderful fond of him is Susan," remarked the keeper as his footsteps died away in the distance.

"Who is he?" Marica could not refrain from

asking.

"Don't know, I'm sure, miss. He comes here often, to see Susan." He jerked his head at the chimpanzee to indicate the bearer of that name. "A nice gentleman he seems to be too, got a way with him the animals seem to like. Why even the mandrill now——" and he embarked on a series of anecdotes to illustrate the young man's power to charm. "As for Susan, when she was ill the other day there was nobody could do nothing with her till he chanced to come in and made her take her food in no time Saved her life, that's what he did. And

I've been with monkeys all my life . .!" he added

with a laugh.

"Most remarkable!" Mr. Fayne observed absentmindedly as he handed Susan a nut. It was evident that he did not find these reminiscences about a mere human being interesting. He had come to see a chimpanzee not to hear about a young man in a morning coat for whom it had formed an attachment. As always, the human note woke no answering chord in his strange mentality. It was interesting and delightful to play the flute to serpents and feed bears with buns off the point of his umbrella—but people bored him.

Five minutes later he was absorbed in watching the seals securing their evening meal. But Marica was thinking of eyes like the Mediterranean set in a "glorious morning face," and wondering if and when and where she would ever see it again.

CHAPTER V.

Though as the days went by it became apparent that no aspect of la vie rieuse was to be encountered at 301 Queen's Gate, it must not be supposed that Lady Plumpton was in any way unsociable. On the contrary she possessed what in late Victorian language would be described as a long "visiting list," from which she derived no small satisfaction.

Sometimes on the afternoons when she called to take Marica for a drive, they would do a round of card-leaving; the barouche would make its leisurely way through innumerable grey squares in South Kensington or Belgravia and stop before fog-coloured stucco porticoes, at which the footman handed in Lady Plumpton's cards. On rare occasions, when the owner was announced to be "At Home, milady!" they would ascend to an L-shaped drawing-room and discuss health or the weather with some life-long acquaintance of Aunt Charlotte's, before driving on again to the next address.

Did Aunt Charlotte know no one at the nice red brick houses with gay window boxes and cheerful balconies before which somehow the barouche never drew up, Marica wondered? For all the old acquaintances of which Lady Plumpton's circle consisted elected to live in the same grey Georgian houses, and all were of the same late Victorian period as herself. None of them wore the air of the world that characterized Lady Sophie Brinton and, in a lesser degree,

Lady Grundisburgh.

It was quite a relief, therefore, when one afternoon, as they were starting out for a drive, Lady Plumpton remarked:

"By the way, Marica, I think I must call at Grundisburgh House this afternoon."

"Oh, I'm so glad!"

She remembered what Peter Trent had told her at the dinner-party in Geneva about Lady Grundisburgh, and besides, there was Anne!

"Do tell me, Aunt Charlotte," she went on eagerly,

"what is Anne like?"

"Oh, Anne is quite charming. She would be a very nice friend for you, my dear! Yes, we must certainly call at Grundisburgh House. Your father, no doubt, has never let Lady Grundisburgh know of his arrival in London?"

"It would be very unlike Papa. And I am afraid he did not find Lady Grundisburgh very amusing!" Charlotte sighed. She had never ceased to regret

Charlotte sighed. She had never ceased to regret that Caroline Dunsfold's tendresse for her brother twenty-five years ago had remained unrequited. Lady Caroline's position and knowledge of the world would have been the making of Edward's career. She would have tolerated none of the unconventionality in which poor Nora positively encouraged him. If Caroline had been his wife Edward would have spent the Easter recess in some safe and important country house, instead of in the ill-fated "Sea Urchin."

Charlotte Plumpton had an immense admiration for Lady Grundisburgh which the great lady's neglect of her did nothing to diminish. Lady Grundisburgh was always kind and affectionate when they met-on the rare occasions when she drove "out to" Queen's Gate to see "the dear old Faynes," as she was wont to call them, or when Lady Plumpton, returning the visit with unfailing punctuality, sailed into the vast drawing-room of 211 Belgrave Square. The three sisters were now quite outside Lady Grundisburgh's world, and though Charlotte from time to time experienced a pang of regret at not receiving invitations to the entertainments which the Morning Post recorded as having taken place at Grundisburgh House, she was, if she had only known it, far happier sitting crocheting at her own fireside than mixing in a world that talked a language almost unknown to

her. The people she met at Lady Grundisburgh's bewildered her. She felt hopelessly out of it in conversation with them. But their social position dispelled any animosity that mere brainy Bohemians would have inspired in her. Lady Grundisburgh and her set represented to Charlotte, as indeed they did to London in general, the climax of exclusive "allrightness."

"I sincerely hope your father will see something of Lady Grundisburgh now you have come to London. my dear Marica," she said impressively. "It will be very nice for you if she invites you to any of her parties. Lady Grundisburgh knows everyone—every-

one who is anyone, that is to say."

"Interesting people? People who think or paint or write? Who do things? Does Lady Grundisburgh have a 'salon'?" Marica asked eagerly.

Perhaps it was at Grundisburgh House that the visions of the great world of which the old books at the Château had given her glimpses were to be

realized! How glorious!
"A 'salon'?" Lady Plumpton repeated in a somewhat bewildered tone. "My dear child, you use such strange expressions! Lady Grundisburgh certainly knows all the interesting people of the dayall the people really worth knowing!"

But when the barouche drew up before the large drab-coloured house in Belgrave Square, her ladyship

was announced to be "not at home."

"Then I will leave my card and mention your Marica!" Lady Plumpton said goodnaturedly, taking out a gold pencil and writing at the top of the card: "Edward and his daughter have arrived at 52 Blenheim Gardens."

She had not miscalculated the effect of her message on Lady Grundisburgh. Two days later the great lady drove out to Blenheim Gardens and invited Mr. Fayne and his daughter to lunch the following

Sunday.

Lady Grundisburgh had indeed created the nearest approach to a "salon" that it would be possible for a hostess with principally "all-British" guests to achieve in modern London. At Grundisburgh House one might, as Charlotte had said, always be sure of meeting the people to whom society has attached its indiscriminating label of "interesting." To this exclusive adjective mere genius can lay no claim. The socially obscure cannot hope to attain it. The middle-class brain with its tiresome trick of concentration on one idea had no place in Lady Grundisburgh's milieu. The "intellects" that gathered round her tea table, or attended her dinners, were almost invariably of the order that are trained from early youth to flit from thought to thought with the nimbleness of a bee extracting at one sip the honey from the flower-rising young politicians, never ponderous in their casual references to affairs of state; distinguished foreigners with introductions from embassies abroad; or such of the "smart set" who had not flown too publicly in the face of convention and who liked to feel "clever" for an hour or two. Lady Grundisburgh was immensely popular with some of the "smart set"; she exercised over them the fascination which discipline often has for the irresponsible; they found it novel and piquant to put on their best behaviour and go to Grundisburgh House just as a child loves to put on its Sunday hat and go to church. It was a delightful diversion from trying new face creams, breeding lap-dogs or ordering frocks at Requin's to sit and feel soulful whilst one discussed Emil Reich, New Thought, Bergson, or Mrs. Eddy.

Custom had ordained that Lady Grundisburgh's opinion should be consulted on every subject; no one knew precisely why it had come to be of so much value but London is not wont to question the infallibility of its oracles. And so aspiring actor-managers wrote honeyed notes begging Lady Grundisburgh to be present at their first nights, social reformers secured the required *cachet* for their schemes by inducing her

to take the chair at meetings, and embryo Pitts confided to her their most cherished schemes for the

confounding of the Government.

It was, therefore, no small honour for Marica and her father to be summoned to attend one of Lady Grundisburgh's Sunday lunches. Mr. Fayne, insensible to his good fortune, at first firmly declared that nothing would induce him to go, but in the end Charlotte's exhortations and Marica's appeals prevailed and he reluctantly donned the antiquated frock-coat, unearthed for him by Denman from the recesses of his wardrobe, and set sadly forth for Belgrave Square.

They were the first guests to arrive. Marica, looking round the huge Louis XVI drawing-room with its beautiful subdued colouring, its wonderful old pictures, the dull gold and brocade that composed the furniture, felt that here was indeed the mise en

scène for her dreams of "salons."

Lady Grundisburgh received them graciously.

"And so this is Miranda?" she asked, turning from Edward Fayne to his daughter.

"Marica!" the girl corrected with a smile.

"Ah, yes, of course! My memory for names is really shocking! Marica, this is my girl, Anne!"

Lady Anne Rufford came forward and shook hands with Marica seriously. She objected on principle to indiscriminate smiling. Lady Anne had inherited her father's amazing commonsense, and everything about her was thoroughly sensible—her clear olive skin, calculated to withstand the wear and tear of wind or weather, her sleek, black hair drawn in no foolish waves about her ears but brushed back firmly into a neat coil at the back of her head, her well-fitting gown that spoke of no particular date, her capable, ringless hands and well-bred feet in their practical low-heeled shoes. She led Marica to a sofa and sitting down beside her began to converse.

Lady Anne had a not unmerited reputation in her

own set as a conversationalist, and she proceeded now to make several extremely intelligent remarks about some lectures she had been attending on the "Renaissance," passing on with the mathematical precision society demands to other subjects—the new opera at Covent Garden, the exhibition of Impressionist pictures on view at the Tate Galleries, the "Life of

Disraeli'' that had just been published.

How Mrs. Humphry Ward would have loved her, Marica reflected, she was so typical of that lady's serious intellectual heroines, so erudite and unrelieved by any spark of humour! All her knowledge was carefully pigeon-holed, she knew just what to think on every subject and the right thing to say about it. When after a few moments, with the social tact that never deserted her, she asked Marica perfunctory questions about her travels, the girl felt at a loss how to reply. Nothing she had ever seen or done seemed of sufficient importance to recount with those clear, appraising eyes fixed unblinkingly upon her countenance. It was a relief when Anne rose at last and moved across the room to help in receiving the guests who were now arriving, and Marica was left alone on the sofa to wonder at the new world in which she found herself.

So far none of the party bore any resemblance to the people her imagination had conjured up as frequenters of "salons." Nothing more prosaic could be imagined than the massive old lady who had just entered and was holding out an enormous hand in a loose grey kid glove to Lady Grundisburgh with a wide-mouthed smile of greeting. The old man with his head on one side, listening appreciatively to Lady Anne, suggested an admiring drake rather than a bel esprit.

But the butler's voice could be heard again above the clamour of voices:

"Mr. Trent!"

Marica sat upright and looked eagerly at the doorway. Could it be her friend—Peter Trent, as Lady

Sophie had called him—the nice whimsical person she had sat next to at the Geneva dinner-party? Yes, it was Peter Trent! And as she looked across the room at his odd impassive profile, she wondered why she felt so glad to see him again. He was not nearly as attractive as many of the men she had seen about in London—the young man at the Zoo, for example!—yet somehow he interested her. She remembered how sympathique he had seemed that evening, how he had told her about London—she hoped he would come and talk to her now.

And, as if in answer to a telepathic wave from the sofa in the corner, he turned his head and their eyes met. The next moment he had crossed the room, and as he shook hands with her, she saw a sudden light pass like an electric flash over his hitherto expressionless face.

"Aren't you going to say it was rather clever of me to be invited to lunch to-day?" he asked quietly

as he sat down beside her.

"Don't you come often?"

"No." He shook his head with a smile. "I'm not an habitué of Grundisburgh House, you know. But for the last—" he paused—" year and nine months I've called religiously."

It was just a year and nine months since that

evening in Geneva!

"Ah, I suppose you find Lady Anne very improving?" she asked demurely. And then with a sudden impulsiveness she added: "Why is it that when one is with stupid people one craves for intellect and when one is with intellectuals one simply longs for someone to come and talk nonsense to one?"

"That's the trouble of having more than one

personality."

"More than one! If it was only that! Do you know," she said sighing, "what it is to feel that you're a perfect boarding-house of personalities?"

"Who all get on very badly together? Yes, I know. But it's only part of being young. Youth is bound to be chaotic if it's to lead to anything. Your boarding-house will settle down quite peacefully in time."

"Has yours?" she could not help asking.

"Oh, yes—most of the tiresome boarders are dead now." And then evidently in order to lead the conversation away from himself, he added in a low

voice: "Ah, here come the Malines!"

A woman of about twenty-eight with Titian red hair and features that seemed to Marica vaguely familiar, followed by a small clean-shaved man in a tight morning-coat, was greeting Lady Grundisburgh in ringing American accents.

"Who are they?" Marica asked. "Somehow I

feel I have seen Mrs. Malines before."

As she spoke she wondered why so cynical a gleam had come into Peter Trent's eyes as he contemplated

the couple.

"Mr. Samuel Malines," he said slowly, in answer to her question, "is the millionaire who has just built the new Venetian Palazzo at the corner of Park Lane."

"Ah! And who is the old man with his head on one side talking to Mrs. Malines?"

"Oh, that is Mr. Erdington."

"I've never heard of him."

"And yet he is quite a famous person."

"Why is he famous?" Marica asked with interest.

"For having conquered London."

"He doesn't look Napoleonic. How did he manage it?"

"By making a 'corner' in bachelors." Marica looked blankly uncomprehending.

"Marica, I wish to introduce Mr. Courtney Vincent!" Lady Grundisburgh said, leading a young man at this moment up to Marica, who, with a despairing glance at Peter Trent, found herself borne along on the descending tide and seated at the long luncheon table next to the very correct person who had just been introduced to her.

Mr. Courtney Vincent was one of those talented beings not infrequently to be found in London society who, without looks, without position, without much money and entirely without charm, has contrived to become the fashion. It was "the thing" to invite Mr. Courtney Vincent. He went everywhere. lists of guests at smart house-parties in the society papers continually wound up with "and Mr. Courtney Vincent " at the end of a string of titles. His insignificant physiognomy with its pointed nose and small up-turned moustache peeped from the back row of groups at royal shooting parties. No one knew, and probably no one had ever enquired, why he was so much in request. Yet the fact was no doubt to be explained by the compliment Mr. Courtney Vincent's presence implied. It was a convincing tribute to his host's or hostess' importance in the social scale. For Mr. Courtney Vincent only went to "the best houses."

The snob is usually popular in English society. The people he finds it worth while to be civil to love him for the subtle flattery conveyed by his attentions, whilst those whose existence he does not trouble to recognise—don't matter. It is really far more flattering to be asked to dance by a snob than to be invited to stay for a week-end by a democratic duke. Few people in London are above this form of flattery; however assured their position may be it is always

pleasant to be reminded of the fact.

At Grundisburgh House Mr. Courtney Vincent always enjoyed a sense of complete social security, and it was therefore with a smile of perfect peacefulness that he turned towards the really lovely girl by whom he found himself and opened the conversation in his usual way.

"There are a good many dances this week, aren't

there?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Are you going to Mrs. Darset's or the Duchess of Wiltshire's on Thursday?"

"To neither."

Ah, she was evidently one of the modern girls, like Lady Anne, who despised dancing!

"You don't care for dances, I suppose?" he asked tentatively.

"On the contrary I am sure I should love them. But I don't know any of the people who give them,

vou see."

Mr. Courtney Vincent raised his eyebrows and glanced at her with a faintly satirical smile. So after all this girl in spite of her exquisite French frock and air of distinction was not one of the elect! Yet why had she then been summoned to this "exclusive" luncheon party? After a moment's almost painful silence he began again in a voice tinged with a shade of condescension.

"The opera was very crowded last night I thought.

Do you go often?"

"I never go at all."

And now it was Marica who smiled. The young man's manner filled her with a sudden perversity. She was determined not to explain the situation to him! If he chose to think less of her for knowing nothing of the world he lived in—well, let him!

Turning towards him with a low ripple of laughter which at a less agitated moment he might have realized to be melodious, she added cheerfully:

"I don't know anything about society, you see. I've never been to a dance or an opera or a race-meeting. I've never seen a duchess in my life. I've never heard of Mrs. Darset. So it's really no use asking me about anything!"

Then sitting back in her chair Marica took a deep breath of relief. That he had "ploughed" her in the social catechism that constitutes the conversation of his kind was undeniable; still she had succeeded quenching the superior smile upon his bland countenance, and replacing it by an expression of outraged surprise.

Turning a chilly shoulder on her he devoted himself

for the rest of lunch time to the deaf German baroness on his other side.

Marica, looking down the table, caught a sympathetic glance from Peter Trent's eyes. Oh, why hadn't Lady Grundisburgh put him next her? He was so different to these other people, all so resolutely oblivious to any sphere of existence outside their own. There was no help to be found in Colonel Vermont, the old man on her right, who glanced with glistening eyes at the menu whilst giving vent to infrequent and abstracted remarks about the weather.

When lunch was over and the women were once more assembled in the drawing-room, Lady Grundisburgh summoned Marica to join the group in which she was seated.

"Marica, I wish to introduce you to Lady Morecambe."

A gentle, old lady, with the rather hen-like profile into which the aquiline features of the well-bred Englishwoman are apt to develop in later life, smiled

at her kindly.

"Lady Morecambe has two daughters of about your age. I hope you will make their acquaintance. Susan," she went on, turning to the massive lady whose arrival had so impressed Marica, "this is Marica, Edward Fayne's daughter. Marica—Lady Susan Bailey."

So this was Lady Susan, Mademoiselle Didier's respected patroness! Marica repressed a smile as Cynthia's nickname for her—"Sergeant Sue"—recurred to her mind. Yes, she was really very like

a policeman!

"Ah! I hear you were at Mademoiselle Didier's?" Lady Susan remarked in a hearty bass voice. "Excellent creature, isn't she? Edith and Florence were devoted to her. I will bring them to call on you one day when we have time."

"Thank you very much," Marica murmured.

"I suppose you learnt to speak German at the

pension?" Lady Grundisburgh enquired with sudden interest.

"Oh, yes, but I have always talked German."

"I am delighted to hear it, for in that case you can be of the greatest help to me. I must introduce you at once to the Baroness von Duttensee."

And turning to the lady on her other side, she proceeded to enunciate Marica's name into the ear-

trumpet extended towards her.

Marica's spirits rose. She was going to be invited to meet all sorts of delightful people—the cosmopolitan society she had always dreamt of. Visions of brilliant diplomats, of fascinating and witty ambassadors rose before her mental eye, and as the dazzling prospect passed through her mind, in a flash, Lady

Grundisburgh continued:

"The Baroness von Duttensee and I will be very glad of your help with a scheme in which we are greatly interested. We have both felt so keenly the loneliness of German maids in London. There are really a surprising number of them; many of whom speak no language but their own. It is so distressing for the poor creatures to be in a strange town without friends or amusements! So we have inaugurated a Club at which we invite them to spend pleasant evenings and anyone who will come and help entertain them in their own language is more than welcome!"

She paused and smiled radiantly at Marica as if expecting a rapturous assent to her proposition. But Marica only gazed at her helplessly. The vision of charmed diplomatic circles was rudely dispelled and in its place she saw a room full of heavy-featured Teutonic femininity in varying conditions of overfed boredom; she saw their heated, high-cheeked countenances, their ample proportions squeezed into tight, over-trimmed bodices. And as she paused for a reply that would be at once civil but sincere, Lady Susan's booming voice broke in again:

"A capital scheme, my dear Caroline! Edith and Florence shall come and help you too—Edith can

play her violin——'' Edith's acquiescence was apparently taken for granted, "they'll like that. But I've got my causeries for charwomen to take up my own time. Our last one on Eugenics was most interesting. You must come to one of them," she added with a condescending nod to Marica.

"Thank you very much!" Marica murmured again, suppressing the shout of laughter that rose bubbling to her lips. With German maids and chatting charwomen she was going to have a gay time indeed! And so far these were the only people she had been invited to meet. The prospect was delirious!

"Ah, dear Lady Susan! Charwomen again! Isn't she just wonderful?" a cheerful voice exclaimed, and Mrs. Samuel Malines moved towards the group and sat down beside Lady Susan.

"Dear Mrs. Malines!" murmured Lady Grundisburgh in an undertone to Marica, "so delightful! So kind! So generous!"

And as the men at this moment came into the room, she turned to Mrs. Malines and remarked with a sudden inspiration: "I must really introduce my old friend, Mr. Fayne, to you. He knows all about Egypt, and I remember you thought of going up the Nile next winter! Edward," she went on, rousing Mr. Fayne from the dialogue on which he had just embarked through the Baroness's ear-trumpet, "Edward, I want to introduce you to Mrs. Malines."

But Mrs. Malines, without a glance in the direction of the "savant," rose to her feet and answered hastily: "I'm really sorry, Lady Grundisburgh, but I must be going on now! I promised the dear Bishop to look in early this afternoon and talk about the new Home of Rest for Snow-shovellers—" and with a hurried handshake, she took her departure, followed by a chorus of murmured admiration from the group of ladies.

"Dear Mrs. Malines! Isn't she charming?"

"Capital!" boomed Lady Susan, "she is coming down to help with the charwomen."

"And she has just promised me £50 towards the

German maids!" added Lady Grundisburgh.

At this point Mr. Fayne, who had been silently watching the retreating figure of the benefactress, looked dreamily at Marica and remarked in a bewildered voice:

"But who is she like, Marica?"

"That is just what I've been wondering!" Marica cried. "She is like someone we know! Ah!" for suddenly she remembered! "It is Bessie Bosham of whom she reminds us!"

"Of course, of course!" Mr. Fayne agreed, smiling at his recollection of the "type of vulgarity."

"Bessie Bosham!" he repeated dreamily.

Marica, finding Lady Grundisburgh's eyes fixed on her with an expression she took to be one of enquiry, felt she must explain; so turning towards her she added with a laugh:

"Bessie Bosham lived at Nice. She was the daughter of Papa's tailor—she ran away with a young

man who travelled in buttons!"

"Really, my dear Marica, these recollections are not particularly interesting!" the voice of Lady Grundisburgh broke in with icy suddenness.

An awful silence had fallen on the group of chattering women.

Marica felt herself grow crimson to the tips of her small ears. What hideous faux pas had she made? Discovered a resemblance between one of Lady Grundisburgh's circle and the daughter of a tailor? Yes, of course! How could she have been so gauche as to forget for the moment the social distinctions that played so much more important a part in this world of society than in the uncomplicated one to which she had been accustomed?

And then the awful silence was broken by a sudden outbreak of conversation. Lady Grundis-

burgh moved away to talk to Mr. Erdington, Lady Susan Bailey stated her opinion of the Suffrage question in stentorian accents to Mr. Courtney Vincent, and Mr. Fayne, peacefully unconscious of the contretemps that had just taken place, resumed his remarks on German explorations down the eartrumpet.

Marica, left alone, looked wildly round for some corner into which to retreat, and catching sight of a half-open French window at the end of the room, she moved hastily towards it. She longed for the open air with all the claustrophobia of the creature bred in solitudes. The day was glorious, one of the perfect summer days that sometimes find their way into early March. Outside the window she caught a glimpse of a wide balcony and beyond that a garden bright with spring flowers. Could she venture to slip out of the window—away from this crowd of terrifying people? And as she hesitated a friendly voice sounded in her ear.

"Come out on the balcony!"

She looked up to encounter the smiling eyes of Peter Trent.

"Yes, yes!" she assented, eagerly moving hastily through the window that he held open for her, and as they sat down on two chairs at the end of the balcony overlooking the soothing green spaces of the garden she asked desperately: "Did you hear what happened?"

He nodded.

"But why was Lady Grundisburgh so annoyed because I said Mrs. Malines was like Bessie Bosham?"

He smiled grimly. "Please don't take it so seriously. You made a very natural mistake, that is all."

"In not realizing the difference between being Mrs. Malines and Bessie Bosham?"

"No, in not recognizing the identity between them!"

She stared at him blankly. "But—surely—"

Then suddenly she understood.

"You mean that Mrs. Malines is Bessie Bosham?" He nodded, smiling,

"But-but-Bessie Bosham was English. Mrs.

Malines is American—"

"It is easy to learn to talk American in a week. In fact if one is in New York the difficulty is not to do so."

"Bessie Bosham went to America-I remember now. She ran away with a traveller from Leedswhat was his name?—ah! of course, Sam Mullins, who travelled in buttons!"

It all came back to her now. The scene in the little French street-Mrs. Bosham weeping, "Sam Mullins a traveller. If only he marries her!" Mullins-Malines! The transition was brilliantly simple.

"He travelled in buttons to some purpose," said the man at her side. "He invented a patent button that made his fortune. And then his wife died and he married Miss Bosham. They immediately came back from America and burst upon London with a house in Park Lane, a grouse moor and a yacht. Is it likely, do you think, that society wants to know any more about them?"

"And I was an awful enfant terrible blurting out

the truth, no wonder they were annoyed!"

"Society always treats as an enfant terrible anyone who mentions a detrimental fact about a person it has decided will be useful to it."

Marica gave a little helpless shrug of the shoulders. "I don't understand a bit-Bessie Bosham-Mrs Malines! But I thought Lady Grundisburgh

admitted no black sheep to her fold?"

"When you have lived a little longer in London you will find there are sheep of all shades in every fold. For one grey sheep that is rigorously excluded two black ones browse peacefully inside."

"And if you don't belong to any fold?" asked

Marica forlornly.

A wave of desolation swept over her. She felt

suddenly so alone and hopeless in this big world she had longed to enter, but now found so vast and bewildering. These women, trained from infancy to the game of society, overwhelmed her with a realisation of her own inexperience. She knew nothing—nothing of the things that made up life to them—the tactful enquiries, discreet replies, and above all the wise silences that enable a woman to keep to the pathway laid down for her by society.

She thought of all the counsellors in the book-case at home whose wisdom had seemed hitherto so all-sufficing, but now appeared almost naïve in its unsophistication. How would Seneca have got on at Grundisburgh House? Or Marcus Aurelius? Or Emerson? Or any of the great simple souls who had

shown her the way until this moment?

But Anne's clear voice was calling along the balcony.

"Marica! Marica! Your father is going and

wants you!"

She turned with a hasty smile of farewell and hurried back into the drawing-room.

CHAPTER VI.

But Marica's indiscretion on the day of the luncheonparty was not destined to alienate her permanently from Lady Grundisburgh's favour. That lady in administering her reproof had acted merely with the vindictiveness of nervous apprehension, and she had struck out, regardless of the girl's feelings, actuated only by the determination to check further revelations.

Marica's reminiscences were singularly ill-timed. For some months past Mrs. Samuel P. Malines had been concentrating her energies—energies of no mean order—on obtaining the *entrée* to Grundisburgh House. Elsewhere her progress had been triumphant, and that portion of the London world that only asks to be amused had crowded to the gorgeous parties that took place at the Venetian palazzo. But Lady Grundisburgh had till quite lately remained apparently unaware of Mrs. Malines' existence.

It was then that Mrs. Malines discovered the latent vein of philanthropy that underlay her social aspirations. In the intervals of devising novel delicacies with her chef and commandeering jeunes premiers to sing at her parties, she found herself yearning over the sorrows of the working classes. If only she could be brought in touch with those who had their needs really at heart! The sympathetic bishop to whom she breathed the wish happened to be an intime of Lady Grundisburgh's Mr. Erdington was her next confidant, and that ubiquitous person did not fail to mention, when next he called at Grundisburgh House, the peculiar interest that German ladies' maids inspired in the mind of the millionairess.

A week later Lady Grundisburgh's card lay on a marble table in the hall of the Palazzo, and not long after a note followed inviting Mr. and Mrs. Samuel P. Malines to one of Lady Grundisburgh's Sunday lunches.

It was on this auspicious occasion that the unfortunate Marica gaily embarked on Bessie Bosham's

biography!

Nothing could have been more embarrassing. Only the day before certain rumours that were current at the clubs with regard to Mr. Samuel P. Malines' former matrimonial ventures had for the first time reached the ears of Lady Grundisburgh, but since it was also stated that the owner of the Palazzo emphatically denied the truth of such rumours, Lady Grundisburgh not unnaturally elected to pursue the charitable course of disbelieving them, especially now that the millionaire's cheques had begun to flow in on her pet charities.

It was therefore not a little disconcerting to have chapter and verse of the said stories voiced suddenly in her drawing-room. The incident of the tailor's shop was a distinct shock to her. That Mrs. Malines was formerly a Miss Bosham of vaguely commercial antecedents in the United States, Lady Grundisburgh had gathered from the conversation of Mr. Erdington—but it is one thing to be connected with trade in a country where everyone is engaged in the same pursuit, and quite another to have stood behind the counter so near home as Nice.

At all costs the *enfant terrible* had to be silenced, before she could make any further revelations! But once silenced there was an end of the matter. Lady Grundisburgh was far too busy a woman to cherish resentment against anyone so unimportant as Marica. The girl seemed otherwise "quite nice," and if she was a trifle *gauche* what else could one expect with poor dear Edward's system of education?

And so before dismissing Marica from her thoughts Lady Grundisburgh kindly begged a few of the less important amongst her acquaintances to go and call at 52 Blenheim Gardens. To the ones really in the thick of the season, which was now beginning, she

knew it would be useless to appeal, but Lady Susan Bailey, whose daughters had been out for twelve or thirteen seasons, and Lady Morecambe, who was always so kind to girls, might be able to find time to befriend Marica.

Edith and Florence Bailey were the first to respond to the appeal. They arrived one afternoon to call, dressed alike in coats and skirts obviously "off the peg," with depressed-looking hats jammed over the limp brown hair that hung in wisps around their faces.

Sitting stiffly opposite Marica they took it in turns to tell her all their doings. Edith had been last night with her mother at a political dinner given by Lady Grimsby; Florence was going next week to the State Ball, etc.

Marica sat listening, her heart wrung with pity. With their large boots and prominent front teeth, they were typical of the French caricaturist's rendering of the English spinster, and her own sketch drawn from imagination long ago at the pension fell far short of the sad reality. What could balls mean to them? What fun did they manage to get out of society?

But nothing was further from the thoughts of the Miss Baileys than they could appear to anyone objects of condolence. They were more than satisfied with their place in the scheme of things. Ever since the bleak February mornings when they made their curtseys to Queen Victoria they had never for a day enjoyed what the modern girl would call "a good time," yet far from regretting the joys that might have been theirs, they found ample consolation in the "importance" of the parties to which they were invited. For the girls who skated, danced and punted in careless unchaperoned freedom they had nothing but the heartiest pity. "We never see them at the parties we go to!" was to condemn anyone to a social limbo terrible to contemplate.

Marica was glad to find the Morecambes' cards in the hall when she returned from a walk a few days later, and with them an invitation to tea at their house in Eaton Square. Lady Grundisburgh had said the Morecambe girls were young, and she craved for youth as a change from the Miss Baileys and Aunt Charlotte's contemporaries. With a light heart she

set forth on the day appointed.

The gay clamour of voices mingling with the tinkling of tea-cups greeted her as she entered the drawing-room where a number of women were collected. Augusta and Adeline Morecambe came forward to receive her; they were both pretty, fair-haired girls with undistinctive aquiline features like their mother's, but about Adeline there was an impulsiveness, a sort of repressed vitality, that appealed at once to Marica.

She found herself led away to a sofa and seated beside Lady Morecambe, whose fine blue eyes were

full of kindly interest.

"So glad to see you, my dear, Lady Grundisburgh told me all about you—your life abroad and so on. I suppose you speak quite a number of languages? Yes! How very nice for you! And now you have come to live in London with your father! I am afraid you must feel rather lonely at times! Of course you will make plenty of friends, but English people are not easy to get to know at first—don't you find that, Miss Funk?" she added, turning to a large young woman who sat calmly nibbling a macaroon, on her other side.

Sadie B. Funk took another nibble and then

answered slowly:

"That's so, Lady Morecambe. Over here in society you've got to be born right in it or butt your way in. Momma and I had to butt a bit at first, but now we're having a perfectly cunning time, I can tell you."

Lady Morecambe repressed a shudder. Nature had denied her any sense of humour, and she simply could not get accustomed to the remarks of the Californian heiress, whom Augusta assured her it was unavoidable

to invite. For Sadie's popularity was undeniable. Her friendly way of throwing a cushion at a young man's head, or greeting him as "Honey!" the first time he came to call had endeared her to many a masculine heart.

Lady Morecambe, like many a modern mother, had succeeded painfully in adapting herself to the modern hustling world that rejects nothing which can contribute to its amusement, but there were moments when a nostalgia for the dignified days of her mid-Victorian youth overcame her. She turned now from the successful Sadie with a sigh and rose to greet a new arrival, a warlike little woman with a fiercely hooked nose, and hard black eyes announced as Mrs. Draycott. She was followed by her daughter, a little creature with a plump pale face framed in black hair like a Pierrette's to whom she always referred as "Birdie."

"Ah, dear Lady Morecambe!" Mrs. Draycott exclaimed in a rasping voice. "Birdie and I felt we must look in on you for a few moments, but we shall have to hurry on again almost at once! So much going on now, isn't there? We are both feeling quite knocked up with it!"

And she launched into detailed accounts of all their gaieties.

Immediately other voices took up the tale—everyone apparently had been enjoying themselves immensely. Marica sat by, feeling strange and helpless as she listened to them.

There was to be a garden-party at Westerham House in May; a cotillon next week at Mrs. Darset's; and of course everybody would be at the polo match next Saturday at Ranelagh.

"Sir Charles Frimley has asked us to dine!"

"Major Marcham is driving us down on his coach!"

A coming bazaar was the next object of discussion. An Empress was to open it. Duchesses were to sell programmes. A foreign monarch was to preside over the American drinks.

"Sir Charles is going to run the hat-trimming

competition!"

"Mr. Balcombe is to be a gondolier!"

"Can't anyone persuade Lord Windlesham to do anything?"

"Oh, Lord Windlesham's hopeless—he simply won't be dragged into anything."

From time to time fresh arrivals came in and each was the signal for a fresh outburst of ecstatic reminiscence.

"Hullo, Violet, been having a good time?"
"Oh, the time of my life!" And so on da capo!
What a glorious time they seemed to be having, thought Marica all the way back to Blenheim Gardens! Life to these girls must be a perpetual feast escorted ever by a host of gallants, they moved from one gay scene to another, on a triumphant career of unbroken successes-eternally on the crest of the wave!

Just as on that evening long ago at the Hôtel des Têtes Couronnées, the gay side of life seemed to her desperately alluring—her dreams of "salons" suddenly gave way to a new desire for mere amusement, and she envied these more fortunate girls with all the fervour of the heart of youth that cries aloud for pleasure. Would she ever take her place in the giddy whirl?—ever be invited by Major Marcham—an imposing man of warlike appearance, she felt certain to sit behind his team of prancing bays on the road to Ranelagh? Would she ever trim hats with Sir Charles Frimley-a young man no doubt of the précieux type of gallantry or float in a gondola with the debonnair Mr. Balcombe? Would she ever spend a delirious week-end at the Parkhams or rotate rapturously over the Mrs. Darset's parquet?

Never in her life had she felt her apartness from the world so keenly. The solitude of the Château du Loup was as nothing to the solitude in the midst of these chattering girls, who all knew each other, all did the same things and went to the same places.

Several of them had been quite kind to her. One charming girl had talked to her for several minutes as if she recognized in Marica a long lost affinity, had pressed her hand affectionately at parting and begged her to come and see her in Mount Street—"You'll find us in the Red Book! Now don't forget to come, will you?"—and a few days later passed Marica in the street with an oblivious smile, having evidently forgotten she had ever met her.

Mrs. Draycott's memory was more retentive, for soon after the tea party at the Morecambes, she came

with "Birdie" to call at Blenheim Gardens.

"Lady Morecambe told us to come and see you! You are a friend of dear Lady Grundisburgh's too, I hear! So delightful, isn't she? Birdie and I are

quite devoted to her!"

"You must come and see us in Chester Terrace!" she ended, as at the end of ten minutes she rose to go. "We live in quite a small way, you know! Only the middle classes have any money nowadays! So our house is quite tiny, but near all our friends—which is the great thing! My brother, Lord Uxbridge, lives in Chester Square, quite close—and was so anxious to have us near him! You must come to tea one day—any Sunday you will probably find us at home, though of course just now, we have a good many week-end engagements."

Marica waited for a fine Sunday afternoon, when it seemed inevitable that this much sought after couple would be booked for some convivial house party, and rang the bell of one of the dingiest of all the little dingy row of houses. It was what the house-agents were fond of describing as a "bijou residence." Certainly it was very bijou. There was just room in the tiny hall to squeeze past the table with its rows of visiting cards, in order to reach the tiny drawing-room which just held the tea-table, a threadbare sofa and four chairs. Still it was in "Belgravia"! In

consideration of the fact that neither sun by day nor electricity by night illumined it, Mrs. Draycott had been able to secure it for what the house-agent assured her was for so "choice" a neighbourhood, a very moderate rental. On the same principle a dusty Italian manservant in a misfit suit of evening clothes, in view of the opportunity of learning English from Mrs. Draycott's bewildered visitors, demanded less remuneration than the neat parlourmaid she considered only suited to the benighted denizens of Kensington or Chelsea.

In answer to Marica's ring, Giuseppe appeared nerving himself for the usual altercation on the doorstep, and his countenance was wreathed in smiles when in answer to his unintelligible English, Marica asked him in his own tongue if Mrs. Draycott was at

home.

"Bene!" he exclaimed, nodding his curly black head, delightedly. "Cosi va bene! The signora," he went on volubly, was "in casa," and he threw

the door hospitably wide.

"Birdie" received her languidly. She hated girls; they were always either "catty" or tiresomely affectionate, which was worse. In the Park, for example, they would be sure to come and sit down beside one just as one had got a young man to oneself. Her mother's excuse for inviting Marica—that at the daughter of an old friend of Lady Grundisburgh's she might prove useful—seemed to Birdie far-fetched and absurd. One could not devote one's time making oneself agreeable to all Lady Grundisburgh's unimportant acquaintances.

So Birdie sipped her tea gently and then turning a shoulder on Marica devoted herself to a young man

with sloping shoulders on her other side.

"Poor Mr. Balcombe, he is so devoted to Birdie!" murmured Mrs. Draycott in an undertone when soon after this Marica rose to go. "I heard him asking her just now if she would keep a dance for him at Lady Grundisburgh's on Monday week. She is

having a little dinner-dance, I believe, but I fear our invitation has been forgotten. If you could say a word to her to remind her——"

"But I haven't had an invitation myself," laughed Marica, "and I've no influence with Lady Grundis-

burgh!''

It was not in fact till the day after the dance in question that Lady Grundisburgh again had occasion to remember the existence of "Edward's girl." She drove up to the door of 301 Queen's Gate just as Marica was coming down the steps.

"My dear Marica!" she exclaimed in her clear bell-like tones, extending a white kid hand in greeting,

"I hope you enjoyed yourself last night!"

"Very much, thank you, I was reading a new life of Voltaire."

"My dear child, what do you mean? You were at our dance, weren't you?"

Marica shook her head with a smile.

"But why not? Are you like Anne—don't you care for dancing?"

"Very much, but—I didn't have an invitation."

"You don't say so? My dear Marica, I am extremely sorry. That foolish Miss Martin—she comes in, you know, to write out invitations for me—Anne's always too busy—must have forgotten. Yet I feel sure I put your name down on the list. Dear me, how too unfortunate!" And she pressed Marica's hand in hers with one of the brilliant smiles which went far to make up her popularity. "By the way, dear," she went on, "when are you coming to help me with my German maids? Harriet says you sing charmingly and they are, many of them, so musical! You really must come and sing to them. What about next Thursday? Engaged? Well, then, later on, but don't forget. Home, Henry!" And she was borne, still smiling graciously, away.

CHAPTER VII.

As the weeks went by, Marica found herself involved in a vortex of tea-parties. The neat red morocco engagement book presented to her by Aunt Charlotte soon held few blanks in the column headed "Afternoon." But under the word "Evening" a row of almost unbroken blanks appeared. Only very rarely she attended an evening "At Home" with Aunt Charlotte or a concert at the Albert Hall with Aunt And once Aunt Louisa took her to a debate at the Pandora Club at which the chief amusement to Marica lay in the almost unearthly appearance of its members. Looking round the room she contemplated the strange collection of human beings with amazement-men with long hair and flowing ties who were said to live on curdled milk and nut cutlets. middle-aged women with short hair, looking like very old schoolboys, girls with large feet encased in sandals and waists that surely no laws of hygiene could necessitate or anatomy explain, and mild, musical boys with long white fingers and eyes of haunting melancholy, set in plump, ivory faces.

Anything less like la vie rieuse could not be imagined! Oh! for the simple unthinking joys of

youth!

The sound of a German band beneath the windows playing dance music after dinner would set her feet tingling and bring the tears to her eyes with almost an agony of longing. Sometimes, unable to bear it, she would rush away from the drawing-room that looked into the street and take refuge in her bedroom on the other side of the house to which the tantalizing sounds could not penetrate. She longed, she ached to dance!

For from the conversation of the girls at tea-parties,

she gathered that it was at dances la vie rieuse was to be found. Week-end parties might be delightful, afternoons at Ranelagh hold wondrous joys, but dances were the goal of every girl's desires! The burning question of life resolved itself into this—how many dances one was invited to! Five a week, and one asked no more of life; three, and one could wear a radiant face before the world; one, and existence seemed but a doubtful blessing; whilst for the unfortunate who was reduced to only four or five a season, it would have been better if female infanticide had been in vogue the season of her birth! It was only a girl like Anne Rufford, asked to dozens, who could afford to despise them.

Adeline, the youngest of the Morecambe girls, who seemed to have developed an affection for Marica, often came in now to see her or asked her to tea at Eaton Square. The two girls rapidly reached the

stage of Christian names and confidences.

"You're so different to the other girls, Marica," she said one day wonderingly, "one feels one can say things to you one couldn't say to anybody else. For example, I'd rather die than let anyone else know I'm not having such a good time as I had last season. It's three years, you see, since Mother gave a dance. By the way," she added suddenly, "couldn't you

persuade your father to give one for you?"

"Papa give a dance? Oh, but how too funny!" cried Marica with a shout of laughter. The idea of Papa doing the honours of the ballroom was gloriously incongruous. "He would be about as much in his element as you would be at a cannibal feast, Adeline!" Her eyes danced with amusement at the vision her imagination pictured for her—Papa murmuring Persian poetry, indignant at the presence of the crowd, maddened by the scraping of the violins, bitterly disgusted with the inanity of the rotating couples.

"What an appalling failure the ball would be!"
"Still," Adeline answered seriously, "you would

have given one and so you would be asked to others. That's the way you see—if you give teas you're asked to teas, if you give dances you're asked to dances, and so on."

"I see, like a penny-in-the-slot machine; you put your penny in the 'Tea' slot or the 'Dance' slot—which ever it is you want. It seems simple."

"Except that sometimes one doesn't get asked back. Several people came to the last ball Mother gave but

never asked us to theirs."

"Yes, I suppose sometimes the machinery is bound to stick—isn't it maddening when one has put in one's penny and can't get out the butter-scotch one yearns for?—but of course, we can't expect to get anything at all. Papa and I have never put a penny into any slot in the society machine."

Adeline looked at her with a sudden light of inspiration in her eye.

"If only we could get Mrs. Darset to ask you to

her parties!"

"Are they very amusing?"

"Oh, well, you see, everybody goes to them!"

This seemed an achievement indeed for any hostess and Marica felt quite excited when one afternoon a few weeks later Mrs. Darset, in response to Adeline's entreaties, came to call on her. She was an amiable little woman of about thirty-five with nondescript features and carefully crimped hair, dressed in uninspired clothes of quite the latest fashion. She smiled a tired automatic smile at intervals, but was evidently without the faintest sense of humour—that greatest aid to conversation between new acquaintances. Marica, striving vainly to keep up the ball of small talk which the occasion demanded, wondered what made anyone a social success in this unaccountable world of London. As a "hostess" she could imagine nothing less entrainante.

But Marica had yet to discover that in modern London the hostess is the least important feature of her own parties; provided the champagne is dry, the music expensive and above all the right people are asked to meet each other, the giver of the feast might leave a waxen effigy of herself at the top of the staircase and retire to well-earned repose without in any way impairing the success of the entertainment. Once a woman has acquired a reputation for getting the right people at her house her position is impregnable; and now for many years the right people had crowded to Mrs. Darset's parties and even Guardsmen answered her invitations. It took half-an-hour to get into the line of carriages in South Street, and one young man wishing to leave early in the evening, unable to breast the tide surging up the staircase, had been obliged to make his escape by the scullery window.

A week later Mrs. Darset sent round a hasty note inviting Marica to one of her little dinners on the following evening. She hoped Miss Fayne would forgive such short notice and come if she was disengaged!

Of course Marica was disengaged, and she wrote back accepting with an ingenuous gratitude that brought an unwonted smile to the lips of Mrs. Darset.

"Poor child, she must have very few invitations to feel so pleased at being asked to fill up a gap at the last moment!"

Mrs. Darset was rewarded by finding Marica quite an addition to her dinner-party. She sent her in with Mr. Balcombe, who was violently scented with eucalyptus as a preventive to the cold he felt to be impending.

"I feel sure I caught it last night coming out of the theatre," he remarked between the courses, turn-

ing mournful eyes in her direction.

On her other side was Lord Framlingham, a strangely unresponsive person of about sixty who spoke at first only in gruff monosyllables, but under the stimulating influence of several glasses of champagne, roused himself to describe to her at consider-

able length the success that had attended his efforts

to catch salmon in the Dee last year.

"It was so clever of you to make poor Lord Framlingham talk!" Mrs. Darset said to Marica gratefully afterwards, "no one else has ever been able to get a word out of him!"

And as the weary hostess sought her couch that night she congratulated herself on the perspicacity which had inspired her to invite Marica to come and help her through with her bores' dinner. Next week she would have a party of really amusing people!

It was natural, Marica began to see, that she should

only glean stray crumbs of hospitality.

The afternoon she spent at Lords with Aunt Harriet struck her as curiously emblematic of her place in the world of London.

"Lord Bunhill has sent us two Rover tickets,"

Aunt Harriet had told her.

"What are Rover tickets?"

"Oh well, they give one the right to sit in any seats that don't happen at the moment to be occupied. When the owners of them come along one has to move on to other empty ones."

Yes, she had a Rover ticket in society—the places she was bidden to occupy were those nobody else wanted or momentarily vacated by someone who

"belonged."

It was owing, however, to one of these unforeseen occurrences that a really gorgeous piece of luck fell to her share in June. The Morecambes had made up a party to go to the Caledonian Ball and at the last moment Adeline caught a chill and being, therefore, unable to go, begged her mother to take Marica in her place. Lady Morecambe consented and a message was hastily despatched to Blenheim Gardens. Marica, receiving it, danced round the room with joy, holding the indignant Balzac by his woolly paws. It was too glorious! She was to go to a ball at last—her first London ball! Was it any wonder that hot and cold

shivers of excitement ran up and down her spine at

the prospect?

There was just time to dash round to her dressmaker in search of a frock for the occasion, and here luck again attended her, for a lovely pale pink frock had arrived the day before from Paris, which fitted Marica exactly. Léontine, as usual, rose to the occasion, and it was with the soothing sensation that she was looking her very best that she arrived at Eaton Square for the dinner that was to precede the ball.

The party consisted of Lady Morecambe, four girls and seven men. Lady Morecambe knew her world well, and wishing to make sure that the girls should all have partners, had invited twelve men to dine and go on with them. Out of this number she calculated that only about four could be reasonably expected to put in an appearance, but though three had neither come nor answered the invitation, only two had failed at the last moment, and the result was the gratifying presence of the seven.

The dinner was excellent, and afterwards two roomy limousines conveyed the party to the Hotel Cecil where the ball was to take place. On arrival, the five women repaired to the cloak-room, whence a few minutes later they emerged to rejoin their attendant cavaliers.

But not one of the seven was to be seen!

The band started the third waltz, the room filled with dancers, but still the group of five waited partner-less in the doorway. And then after a time, as they stood scanning the crowd, one after another of the faithless seven flashed upon their sight, dancing peacefully with other women, or leading them away to sit out in secluded corners.

Lady Morecambe's gentle well-bred face grew

delicately pink with vexation.

"Oh, my dear," she said tremulously, laying her hand on Marica's arm, "I am so sorry!" All at once the fine blue eyes filled with tears. "Believe

me, dear Marica, I meant it for the best! I never dreamt that this could happen!"

"Oh, please, dear, dearest Lady Morecambe, don't be unhappy on my account!" Marica answered, giving the gentle old hand a quick squeeze, "It's really so amusing watching the people, and—and I don't mind a bit about dancing!" she added mendaciously.

Suddenly she gave a joyful exclamation, for at this moment she looked up to see Peter Trent coming towards her through the crowd.

"Will you give me this dance?" he asked.

She could have hugged him with gratitude!

- "You see it's all right!" she whispered hastily to Lady Morecambe, whose harassed features had lit up with relief, and as she moved away with Peter Trent, she went on gaily:
- "How is it that you always appear at the right moment to my rescue, like Pallas Athene did whenever a Greek hero was in a tight place? You did it that awful Sunday at Grundisburgh House, and now again to-night!"
- "What was the matter to-night?" he asked sympathetically.
- "I'll tell you afterwards—don't let's spoil this lovely waltz by thinking of anything tiresome."

Peter Trent, to her surprise, danced perfectly—somehow she had not supposed him capable of so frivolous an accomplishment.

"Do you go to many dances?" she asked him.

"I haven't been to one for years, but to-night a little cousin from the country asked me to bring her, and now you see my virtue is rewarded!"

"What do you do with yourself usually?"

"Work. A struggling barrister can't afford to frivol. And you?" he added. "Is London all you expected? How has the monster treated you?"

She smiled. How well she remembered that con-

versation in Geneva—it was nice of him to remember

"I don't know," she answered with a little shrug of the shoulders, "I know so little of it so far. We live right out of everything. Papa and I in our backwater of Blenheim Gardens. Yet all the time one feels the stream of life is going on so fast!"

"People who have got it in them to live are bound to live—some time," he said, "and you will never

stagnate."

He looked down at her small face tenderly. How alive it was! How full of glowing, healthy joie de vivre! No, she was never made to leave life untasted!

Afterwards, as they sat out between the dances, she told him the story of the faithless seven. "Wasn't it sickening of them?" she asked indignantly. "Lady Morecambe had even given them their tickets!"

"The London dancing man is a breed apart," he said with a shrug. "You can't judge him by the ordinary standards of civilization. But perhaps if you knew more of the methods of London women you mightn't blame him so much. And now may I introduce some other partners to you? There are others, you know, of a different type."

After that all was well. The defection of the seven was amply atoned for by the unfailing supply of partners that Peter produced at intervals throughout the evening, several of whom Marica succeeded in passing on to Augusta and the other girls of her party, who were to be seen standing out from time to time at Lady Morecambe's side.

"Of course, Lady Morecambe will never speak to any of the seven men again?" she said to Augusta later.

"Oh, my dear!" Augusta answered, "how could one take any notice of that sort of thing? It would never do to seem offended. And besides," she added with a shrug, "what use would it be to cut them?

There are always so many other women only too glad to have them at any price!"

Why were men so rare, Marica wondered? Every day the Morning Post recorded the birth of male babies, yet men were hardly ever to be met at the houses to which she was invited. Even in their own homes the male members of a family were always conspicuous by their absence. Husbands, brothers, fathers were invisible beings who lived in their lairs on the ground floor to which only the butler had the entrée and from which, at the sound of approaching guests, they could always make good their escape.

Marica, coming downstairs after a late afternoon visit to a girl friend, had sometimes in the hall or on the staircase passed strange young men in evening dress hurrying out to dine, who, by their resemblance to the girls in the drawing-room above, she guessed to be their brothers. But they never appeared in the drawing-room. Even the fathers of families hardly seemed to concern themselves with the doings of their womenkind, and made the acquaintance of their future sons-in-law when those young men arrived to tell them they had proposed to their daughters.

At the end of six months' acquaintance with the Morecambe girls she had only once caught a glimpse of Lord Morecambe hurrying through the front hall in a preoccupied manner, whilst Freddy, their brother, known to the world as Captain Morecambe, remained shrouded in mystery. His photograph in a muchbraided uniform stood in a silver frame on the drawing-room piano, and from time to time his sisters spoke admiringly of his successes at polo, but though apparently he slept at Eaton Square, he was never to be seen there in the day-time.

There were men, of a kind, sometimes to be met there at tea-time, but anything less like her conception of the "gallants," these girls' conversation had conjured up in her mind, could not be imagined. Sunday afternoon in London she soon discovered was

the time for "gallants." It was then that looking from the window in Blenheim Gardens she could see the beaming housemaids hurrying flustered and eager to meet the young men waiting for them at the street corners. Everywhere one met the couples--workgirls, "generals," waitresses, all rapturously clinging to the arm of something male—no matter whether chinless or bowlegged, no matter whether a raw boy with three hairs sprouting from his upper lip, with tapiocacoloured cheeks and tobacco-tinted teeth; still, as a peg for the eternal feminine to hang upon, he served his purpose. And upstairs in the drawing-room of society, the same theme with variations was repeated. Here one did not bound, red-cheeked and eager to a rendezvous; one waited with feelings no less tumultuous for the ringing of the door bell which heralded the arrival of something in a morning coat and sober Sunday tie, that for reasons punctilious or amorous had included one in his round of house to house visitation.

It was thus that the Morecambe girls were occupied on the Sunday afternoons when they invited Marica to tea with them to meet the aforesaid gallants. it was that she made the acquaintance of Sir Charles Frimley, the précieux young man of her imaginings who turned out to be large and slow-witted with fat hands and a passion for seed cake, which his kind hostesses always provided for him and of which he never failed to eat five slices. Major Marcham, the dashing driver of the prancing bays, she found to be a little man of fifty with absurd short legs and a quacking voice which was almost unintelligible. And though he actually invited her to sit on the box seat of his coach to Ranelagh, they arrived far too late at their destination owing to his invariable habit of mixing up the leaders and wheelers of his team into an inextricable tangle all along the route. Mr. Erdington, his early struggles forgotten, was often to be seen at tea-time, and also Mr. Balcombe, a young man with a falsetto voice who lived in terror of catching cold, and when the weather was damp, brought shoes in a brown paper parcel to change into in the hall. Then there was old Colonel Vermont who carried "menus" about in his pocket and read them over to himself in the intervals of conversation; whilst the advent of Mr. Courtney Vincent was apparently a

matter for no little self-congratulation.

Where were real men to be met—men like Susan's friend for example? Only once since that day at the Zoo she had again caught a glimpse of the face that had appealed to her with such overwhelming force. At the Eton and Harrow match, as she sat on the lawn outside the luncheon tents with Aunt Harriet, it had flashed upon her in the crowd. The young man was this time accompanied by a small chubby boy in an Eton coat, who clung affectionately to his arm.

"I say, Tim," the boy said in a shrill, eager voice as the couple passed close to Marica, "d'you think there's any chance of my getting into the eleven when I'm at Eton?"

"Why, yes, old chap!" Tim answered with the careless man-to-man familiarity which delights the heart of extreme youth, "if you practise hard there's no earthly reason you shouldn't get into it in time. We must have lots of games in the holidays." And

the two friends disappeared into a tent.

So his name was Tim—such a dear cosy little name!—and he was as charming to the young of the human race as to that of the monkey tribe! No modern poseur this, who rhapsodizes about animals and remains blind and deaf to the humour and the pathos of childhood. The little chubby boy evidently shared Susan's infatuation and no wonder—he must be such a dear, this happy, sympathetic person with the clean, sunburnt skin and smiling blue eyes! Since then she had scanned the weary London crowds in vain for a sight of him, but her reason told her she would never meet him in the world of society. She was sure one would never meet him at a tea-party

where, balancing a tea-cup perilously on one's knee, one sat reciting the social catechism.

"Were you at Ranelagh, yesterday?"

"No, I was at Hurlingham."

"Have you been to the new piece at the Haymarket?"

"Yes-so delightful! Have you been to the St.

James's ?" etc., etc.

Marica, still unable to join heartily in the responses, took refuge in a smiling acquiescence which soon gained her a reputation for being fascinating. Few women realise the deadly fascination that silence often exercises over the male mind. If only this fact could be brought home to them half the Rest Cure Homes in England might be abolished. It is the exertion of prattling prettily and persistently smiling that wears out the London woman's nervous system. Provided, of course, that she is pleasant to look at, a woman may often accomplish more by saying nothing at all. Marica was quite pretty enough to do this successfully. One had only to remember to smile at intervals and everybody thought one charming. By degrees the Morecambe's Sunday afternoon callers took to including 52 Blenheim Gardens in their rounds, and Marica sat at home pouring out tea and wondering what to say to them.

Balzac fortunately provided a helpful topic of conversation; an Englishman always feels safe when talking about a dog, a subject that cannot well lead to any subtleties. And Balzac with a resourcefulness for which Marica could not feel too grateful, had developed a passion for doing tricks that would have done credit to a canine star at the Hippodrome. Singing was perhaps his forte, as Balzac was deeply musical. At the first note of music—a barrel organ playing under the window, or church bells ringing for a wedding—he would rush to the window and join in with the fervour of an enthusiast at a Methodist meeting. Marica had only to sit down to the piano and strike a few chords for

Balzac to dash madly down from his retreat beneath Léontine's bed and hurl himself against the drawing-room door. Huddled against Marica's gown, he would throw back his head and pour forth all his little soul in a tremulous mezzo-soprano, that was strangely human.

At Marica's little tea parties he never failed to put in an appearance, walking round the tea-table on his hind legs and spelling out the word CAKE with letters

he fetched himself from a box in the corner.

Yet even Balzac failed to establish an affinity between Marica and her guests. They came and went with the curious impersonal calm that only Englishmen can maintain in the society of an attractive woman. Marica wondered what they thought about—what brought them to see her? Never for a moment could she succeed in feeling that she had got in touch with their mentalities.

To her surprise one afternoon, Sir Charles Frimley asked if he might be allowed to call at Blenheim Gardens. Marica had hitherto regarded him entirely as the property of Augusta Morecambe—from sundry hints dropped by Adeline, she gathered that before long Augusta would become Lady Frimley—and the suddenness of his request found her therefore unprepared. She could only murmur: "Oh, certainly!" without a thought of what her assent might lead to. But nothing should induce her to provide seed-cake! On that point from the outset she was firm, and though on each succeeding visit she perversely plied him with "petits fours" and "muffins"—both of which he detested—he still persisted in coming.

And then one Sunday afternoon, some weeks later, after he had finished his fifth cup of tea, he broke an

oppressive silence by suddenly proposing.

"You'd much better say yes, Marica. We could put in quite a good time—you're just my sort, you see!"

Just his sort!

"Do you really think so?" she answered with a

sinking heart. And whilst in thick accents he explained to her why, for reasons social and financial, she should accept his offer, the girl sat gazing at him

with a passionate regret.

Oh, why wasn't he different! It was the first proposal she had ever received, and she had never felt less romantic! Why couldn't it have been someone else—a man with bleached hair and smiling blue eyes, lean and supple, an out-door man—who sat here now telling her that he loved her?

A sudden wave of longing for the great primitive emotions came over her—London, as she knew it, with its crowd of smiling automatons and absence of all warm, living, vital feeling seemed suddenly an atmosphere that she could breathe no longer. It was like being in a huge aquarium surrounded only by cold green water and fishes that swam round stolidly

opening their mouths for crumbs.

Where in all this world of prose was the true romance to be found? Where were the lovers of the old days—the men and women whose love stories rang down through the ages, who made out of marriage or even out of great liaisons a true epithalamium? Paolo and Francesca; Sappho and Laon; Julie de l'Espinasse and her lovers; the fascinating Comtesse and the adorable Chevalier—did such beings still walk the earth? Or was romance dead, dead as the hearts that once beat tumultuously with love and hatred, hope and despair, and now were dust beneath their coffin-lids?

Yes, she told herself, romance was dead—love was becoming an extinct emotion which future generations would read of as having greatly troubled the human race in the dark ages of the past. To "put in a good time," that was all that was now worth living for! The whole of life resolved itself into that—to "put in a good time!"

CHAPTER VIII.

It was not until the beginning of Marica's second season in London that Lady Plumpton had her way about presenting her at Court. At first Mr. Fayne had violently opposed the proposition.

"It is perfectly ridiculous, Charlotte, for people in

our position!"

"În our position, Edward? But you seem to forget that the Faynes are one of the oldest families in England!"

Charlotte's reverence for her ancestors was almost

Shintoistic.

"I have never said they were not!" Mr. Fayne answered indifferently. "My point is that we have now nothing whatever to do with the Court. And in that case it is mere snobbery to go there."

"But hundreds of people are presented who have

nothing to do with the Court."

"Hundreds of people are snobs!" said Mr. Fayne, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"But, Edward, being presented is always looked

upon as a girl's entrée to society!"

"Surely nobody is ingenuous enough to suppose it really to be that? A girl is no more in society because she has been to Court than because she has visited the Albert Memorial."

"But if she ever goes to Vienna---"

"If Marica ever goes to Vienna there will be time enough to think about it then. You do not have yourself inoculated for sleeping sickness in case you ever go to Uganda."

Charlotte sighed and gave up the contest as everyone did after a few moments or arguing with Edward Fayne. He had an extraordinary faculty for making anyone who did not agree with him appear foolish—even to themselves.

"Anyhow it would be a pleasure to the child!" Lady Plumpton remarked with what she felt to be a

feeble abandonment of her position.

"Would it? That alters it!" Mr. Fayne answered with a sudden change of front. "If Marica wants to go——"

"Of course she does!"

"We will ask her!" Marica was summoned.

"Do you wish to go to Court, my love?" her father asked sadly.

"Oh, yes, Papa!" Marica cried, with shining

eyes.

"But why, my child, why?"

"Because I should like to go anywhere—to anything—new and different—to see people—"

"What people?"

"The King and Queen, of course, my dear

Edward!" Lady Plumpton interposed firmly.

Mr. Fayne raised his eyebrows. He had no leanings towards democracy, but royalty held no glamour for him—unless it had been enshrouded for several thousand years in a mummy case. His attitude of amiable indifference to rank and position was that only to be found in people with a Gallic strain in their temperaments. But Charlotte had none of this; her respect for royalty was entirely Anglo-Saxon.

"Well, my love, since you so much wish it, you may go to the Court!" Mr. Fayne said at last with a satirical smile. "But I warn you that you will not

find it amusing!"

Marica was sure she would find anything amusing, and drove away in high spirits with Lady Plumpton to order her gown for the great occasion. This one, Lady Plumpton assured her, could not be entrusted to Madame Pervenche, an obscure genius Marica had discovered in Chelsea—that personage of vague official import—a "Court dressmaker" must be consulted.

And though the gown that resulted from the interview was constructed with a superb disregard of line, its texture was exquisite and Marica's youth triumphed successfully over its shortcomings.

Léontine wept tears of joy and admiration; Mr. Fayne smiled an unwilling smile of approval, and as Marica drove away with her aunt, Lady Plumpton pressed her slim white-gloved hand, and exclaimed:

"You look charming, Marica, I shall be really proud of you!"

But with the arrival at the Palace the glory departed. Marica was no longer a dazzling vision, a radiant unit that compelled attention, but one of a large jostling crowd of "visions," many of them pretty, nearly all at home in their surroundings.

As she took her place on one of the gilt chairs beside Lady Plumpton, who had discovered a Jamaican acquaintance in a rotund olive-tinted lady on her other side, Marica amused herself by watching the people. Close to her sat a mother and daughter, the mother in a condition of frenzied anxiety about her girl's complexion which nervousness had reduced to a greenish pallor.

"If only you had put on a touch of rouge, Hermione!" Marica could hear her saying in an agitated whisper. "But anyhow don't forget to pinch your cheeks when our turn comes—like this, you know," and by way of illustration she administered a sharp nip to the plump cheek nearest her which immediately turned to a dull plum-colour leaving the other side of the girl's face more pallid than ever by contrast.

It was not long before a Court official appeared to herd the occupants of the row in the direction of the Throne Room.

"Come, Marica, it is our turn now!" Marica heard her aunt's voice saying cheerfully, whilst on her other side the anxious mother whispered final injunctions to her daughter. "Now, Hermione, both cheeks! Hard! Harder!"

The line moved onwards to the door.

And then after another halt or two in the intervening rooms, Marica, following in the wake of Lady Plumpton, found herself at the entrance to the Throne Room and heard their names called out whilst an official spread out her train behind her.

The brief transit past the royal presences was over in a moment, and she was back again amongst the crowd with Aunt Charlotte breathing a deep sigh of

relief at her side.

"So that's over, Marica! You were not at all nervous, were you? Ah, Colonel Weybridge, how are you?" as another Jamaican acquaintance claimed her.

If only she knew someone to talk to, thought Marica, as she looked at the sea of unknown faces around her, and at that moment the tones of a clear ringing voice, that seemed somehow familiar, fell on her ears. She turned to recognize Lady Sophie Brinton, greeting a group of friends, as brilliant and full of joie-de-vivre as ever.

"And how's Cynthia, Lady Sophie?" one of the

group could be heard enquiring:

"Oh, Cynthia's enjoying herself as usual. She came with me to-night—where is the naughty girl, I wonder?" she added, looking round enquiringly. Her eyes fell on Marica whom of course she did not recognize, for no one really "smart" remembers anyone or anything. So sweeping the girl's face with a smiling, oblivious glance, she continued to search for the missing Cynthia.

"Ah, there she is!" she exclaimed loudly, as Cynthia's yellow head appeared amongst the crowd.

But Cynthia had caught sight of Marica, and disregarding her mother's beckoning hand dashed at her old schoolfellow and seized her by the arm.

"Hullo, Marica, so we meet again! This is a bit better than old Mother Didier's, isn't it?—London, I mean, not this sort of thing!" she added, with an

impish grimace at the feathered heads around her. "But look here, let's go and sit down over there and have a good talk!"

Marica, forgetting all her past indignation with Cynthia in the relief of being greeted thus heartily by anything as gay and careless amongst the crowd where she had felt so lonely, allowed herself to be drawn away to the seat indicated by Cynthia.

As of old, Cynthia's bounding vitality disarmed her and the two girls sat looking with frank curiosity into each other's faces. Cynthia's rudimentary features had undergone very little change in the last two years, but her colouring was more vivid—her plump cheeks pinker, her full lips redder, her eyes brighter than in the old days at the *pension*. She had never been pretty, but now she was "handsome" in a sort of reckless way and she had succeeded, in spite of the restraining influence of Court dress, in retaining that resemblance to the chorus which it is the aim of her world to achieve.

"I say, Marica," she went on with the cheerful candour characteristic of her, "you've grown awfully pretty, y'know! Really ever so much prettier than I expected! You used to be too thin in those days, but now you've filled out and you're lovely, yes, really lovely!" She tilted her yellow head critically to one side and showed all her strong young teeth in a smile of approval. "Tell me though, how is it we've never met anywhere before—at race-meetings, the opera, Mendlesham House, or any of the other dances Mother drags me to?"

"Those sort of things don't come my way,

Cynthia."

"Who takes you out then?"

"No one!" And then as the old simile recurred to her, Marica added with a smile: "You see, I've only got a Rover ticket in society. The few people I know—Lady Grundisburgh, the Baileys, the Morecambes——"

"The dullest set in London!" Cynthia interposed with a groan. "Go on, Marica!"

"Well, of course, they all have their own

places---,

"In the M.C.C.!" laughed Cynthia, and then growing serious again, she asked: "But don't you know any men, Marica?"

"I know Mr. Erdington and Major Marcham and

Mr. Vincent Courtney and ""

Cynthia cast up her eyes in dismay. "Heavens, how deadly for you!"

For a moment she contemplated Marica through

half-shut eyes and then said reflectively:

"I see just how it is, Marica, you're Cinderella sitting over the fire in her new ball-gown, with the mice and the pumpkins at the door and the Fairy Prince waiting at the ball, but no fairy godmother to take you!" Suddenly she leant forward and giving Marica's arm a confidential squeeze she added impressively: "Why wait for the fairy godmother? Go to the ball without her, Marica!"

"Alone?"

"Of course not! Get another Fairy Prince to take you! That's how we manage nowadays-fairy godmothers have gone out of date, you see!" And seeing the look of blank non-comprehension in Marica's eyes she went on: "In this wicked world, my dear, if a girl has got to make her own way it's not the other women who will help her. They'll only push her under. Cinderella can sit for ever over the fire, for unless she's got a successful papa in Chicago no fairy godmother will be bothered to take her to the ball! So Cinderella's only chance is to get there without her. In plain English, dear Saint Marica, don't waste time being nice to women, make allies of men! They'll see you're asked about-invited to country houses where the real fun goes on. You're quite pretty enough! I'll introduce some to you, if you like. I've lots of pals, you know—pals to suit all occasions, one I always take racing, others I ring

up for dances, another goes with me to country houses. It's the only way to make sure of not being bored. Never trust a woman to choose the men she asks to meet you-take your own with you, it's far safer!" She leant forward again and added with a laugh. "And when you get there, Marica—to a house you find amusing, don't waste your fascinations on your hostess, she won't appreciate them! Keep them for her husband—you'll be asked again!"

Marica rose to her feet and looked Cynthia quietly

in the eve.

"Thank you, Cynthia, your advice is very illuminating !-But on the whole I think I prefer the rôle

of Cinderella to adopting your methods."

"Then whilst you're sitting over the ashes, dear Cinderella!" laughed Cynthia, "the Fairy Prince, having grown tired of waiting, will allow himself to be annexed by some star of the chorus who knows how to play her cards—but Mother's beckoning, I must really go!" And as she moved away, she added over her shoulder gaily: "Be clever, sweet maid, and let who will be good, or you'll never have a good time, Marica!"

CHAPTER IX.

THERE is probably no shorter cut to popular favour

than to expose the "sins of society."

The novelist, dramatist or preacher who takes for his theme swindling baronets or flirting countesses is—provided he has a talent for realistic description—fairly certain of a hearing. The working classes can enter thoroughly into a mentality which so closely resembles their own; the middle class, with a greater power of mental effort, enjoys the translation from its own respectability into a sphere of daring it cannot hope to emulate; meanwhile society itself maintains an attitude of amused complacency at the sensation it creates. Like a spoilt child it would rather be noticed for being naughty than not be noticed at all.

Society adored Canon Burnleigh. He had such a delightful way of introducing topical allusions into his sermons. His audience smiled complacently or stole covert glances at each other when he referred scathingly to a recent bridge scandal. An elopement stirred him to eloquence almost as dramatic as Charles Wyndham in the last act of "The Liars." And then sometimes he scolded them en masse—they were all

heartless, pleasure-loving, luxurious

"Go home," he had been known to exclaim witheringly, "to your turtle soup and caviare and forget the poor as you have always done before!" And aristocratic old ladies going back to roast mutton at their little houses in lower Belgravia smiled appreciatively, whilst Cadogan Square "hostesses" made a mental note to try the new place for caviare old Colonel Vermont had recommended yesterday. At any rate there was no resentment felt by any member of the congregation. Nearly every woman loves to be called heartless, only to tell her she is brainless

really rouses her indignation. So the congregation of St. Nathaniel's bore Canon Burnleigh's strictures with equanimity. Canon Burnleigh knew the psychology of his audience au fond. Nothing he said would prevent his being invited to share the turtle soup and caviare in question. He knew that as long as he inveighed against its wickedness, society would continue to flock to St. Nathaniel's. knew better than ever to refer to its meanness. He might take safely as his theme the story of Dives and Lazarus, but he would never commit the solecism of preaching on the text: "But thou when thou givest a feast "-and suggesting that not only the poor of the East End should be remembered, but those others, for kindness towards whom no special merit attaches—one's "unsmart" acquaint-ances. Society would endure being remonstrated with on its want of charity-it would not care to be reminded that for some of its oldest friends it had reserved no greater mark of remembrance than to send them its spare vouchers for Ranelagh when it went out of town at the end of the season.

Lady Morecambe was one of the most regular attendants at St. Nathaniel's. Canon Burnleigh's strictures on society found a hearty echo in her harassed mind. It was soothing to hear that portion of society inveighed against in which the girls married so much more easily than in her own. For the set she belonged to, which was usually spoken of in London as the "Grundisburgh set," prided itself on being infinitely more exclusive than the one known as the "Brinton set," and in which most of the scandals mentioned by Canon Burnleigh occurred. "Hooligan girls" in the "Brinton set" were almost as much in request as young men, but she was thankful that this description in no way applied to Augusta and Adeline. Yet to achieve the same results by her own well-bred methods involved a diplomacy from which the other set were happily exempt.

It was impossible to practise the indiscriminate hospitality in vogue amongst those irresponsible butterflies, and only by a carefully laid plan of campaign could one hope to achieve any measure of success in the social struggle.

Yet through it all she clung to her pride. She would not descend to the methods of Mrs. Draycott and "tout" for invitations; only in the sending of them out one must exercise a system of selection which was nothing short of brain-racking.

One afternoon in April a year after her arrival in London, Marica dropping in to tea at Eaton Square found Lady Morecambe in the throes of re-arranging a dinner-party that was to take place the following week. The usual contretemps had occurred—two men had failed already, and the problem of finding any others to take their place had reduced her to the London hostess's periodic condition of frenzied despair.

"If only Freddy could be persuaded to dine at home that night," she said plaintively, and then evidently realizing from former experience the hopelessness of such an attempt, she turned to her younger daughter and added: "I am afraid you will have to dine upstairs, Adeline—there is nothing else to be done!"

Adeline accepted the decree of banishment meekly whilst Marica shot a sympathetic glance in her direction.

"How horrid for you, Adeline!" she said afterwards, as the two girls sat together in the back drawing-room. "Why couldn't you and I go off together and dine at a restaurant like two young men? Imagine one of them consenting to eat their dinner in their bedrooms because there weren't enough girls to go round! They'd go off, of course, and get an excellent one elsewhere. Why shouldn't we do the same?"

"Oh, Marica, how could we?"

"No, I suppose we couldn't. But I'll tell you what we can do—Balzac and I will come and keep you company, have a sort of picnic all together! Wouldn't that be fun?"

"Why of course it would be splendid!" Adeline agreed. "Mannering—the head housemaid, you know!—can bring up enough dinner for us all. Yes,

do come, dear Marica!"

On the night of the dinner-party, Marica arrived, as had been agreed, when all the guests were safely in the dining-room and Adeline in a tea-gown of uncompromising British design was waiting for her on the second landing. Balzac bounded forward, and pushing past his hostess, dashed through the open doorway of a room behind her.

"Is that your room, Adeline?" asked Marica, who had hitherto never penetrated beyond the drawing-

room floor on her visits to Eaton Square.

"Oh, no, I'm up above, on the third floor. That is Freddy's room—would you like to see it? He has

rather nice things, you know!

And she led the way into a snug, cheerful room decorated with sporting trophies of every description—old hunting prints, foxes' brushes, racks with polo whips and riding crops all round the walls. Marica listened absent-mindedly to Adeline's accounts of Freddy's prowess, whilst she glanced with far more real interest at the photographs of musical comedy

ladies on the dressing-table.

"Oh, yes, Freddy admires Tilly Tankerville desperately," Adeline remarked with a sigh, following the direction of Marica's eyes which rested on the picture of a pretty girl of the *ingénue* type with which the cathedral towns of England abound, but who across the footlights exercise so mysterious a fascination over the minds of London's *jeunesse dorée*. "Mother is very worried about it. I believe Freddy is taking her out to supper to-night."

"He seems to be frightfully in request everywhere!" Marica said as she caught sight of the looking-glass over the mantel-piece crammed all round its edges with letters and invitation cards of all shapes and sizes.

"Lady Belman at Home-Dancing." Duchess of Branksome requests the pleasure of behind the brief injunction "Come and dance Monday" in a "smart" illiterate hand at the top of a visiting card.

"Oh, yes," Adeline said, with a laugh, in answer to Marica's exclamation, "of course men like Freddy get asked to everything. They're booked up for months ahead. Freddy could go to half-a-dozen dances a night if he wanted to!"

"Can't he take you to any of them?" Marica asked, remembering that the Morecambe girls were

in the sad "six a season" category.

"Oh, no! Imagine Freddy asking! Besides he doesn't know half the people who invite him! He's asked to dances-and dinners too-by women he's never even heard of."

"Adeline!"

Adeline shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, my dear, women have got to get men somehow and thev'll do anything. If they can't get them to their dances of their own accord they send round a motor omnibus to the clubs to collect them. They run special trains to Pirbright to bring up Guardsmen. Even then they can't get the ones they want most-men like Lord Windlesham, for example."

"I'm beginning to be quite interested in Lord Windlesham—he's always spoken of as so elusive!"

"Oh, he is! But dreadfully fascinating—everyone says! Freddy knows him quite well, but we've never met him!" Adeline said with a sigh. Then, taking Marica by the arm, she led her upstairs to the back bedroom which fell to her share as the younger daughter.

Marica, declining her hostess' offer of the only

armchair, perched on the edge of Adeline's bed with

Balzac huddled up against her.

"Adeline," she said thoughtfully, "I wonder why it is that one never does meet the sort of men one would like to know—in London. They exist—one sees them, quite nice people with sunburnt faces and an open-air look, turning into their clubs, coming out of saddlers, in all sorts of odd places—" she paused, as her mind wandered momentarily to the monkeyhouse, "but somehow one never meets them in houses. What happens to them all? Do they live in holes in the ground, I wonder?" she ended with a laugh.

But the entrance of Mannering, the housemaid, bearing their banquet on a battered tray, put a stop to the discussion. The party of three proceeded to attack the strange meal, consisting of such fragments of the dinner-party down below as Mannering had been able to succeed in wresting from Henry, the footman, on their rapid passage from the dining-room to the pantry where Murchison, the butler, fork in hand, stood ready to harpoon all the most succulent

morsels.

"Do you know," Marica remarked a little later, as she plied Balzac with crisp quail bones, "I believe that men—quite nice sort of men, I mean—are not nearly so elusive in other parts of London. The red-haired girls who live next to us in Blenheim Gardens have lots of young men always coming to see them—"

"Yes, I know!" Adeline said with a nod of comprehension. "Medical students, journalists, boys from crammers who go with them to tennis clubs and subscription dances at the Empress rooms—yes, I suppose those sort of girls have quite a good time really. The trouble with us is——" she paused, her smooth brow puckered with unwonted thought.

"That you've got to live up to your traditions!" Marica ended the sentence for her. "And the men of your world don't want to!" she added with a sudden

flash of insight. "I believe that nothing bores them so much as the women who want living up to—that's why they fly to girls like Tilly Tankerville or Cynthia Brinton. No, Balzac—" she turned severely to the little dog who was nudging her elbow persistently with his small black nose, "you're not going to have another ice wafer! Oh, Adeline, what a heavenly ice—I'm so glad it hadn't all melted before it got to us!" and she put down the empty glass plate, with a sigh of satisfaction, on the little table beside the bed. As she did so, a vellum-covered book, which lay there, caught her eye. She read the title wonderingly, aloud.

"'Poems of Passion'! What are they like, Adeline?"

"Oh, they're wonderful! Ella Wheeler Wilcox, you know!" Adeline answered in an inward voice of rapture.

Marica took up the book and as she turned the well-marked pages, a small, unmounted photograph fell out from amongst them and fluttered to the ground.

Adeline, with a blush, sprang forward to retrieve it but not before Marica had caught a glimpse of a manly form in a knickerbocker suit face upwards on

the carpet.

"Oh, do show it to me! Tell me who it is!" she cried, thrilled with excitement at having discovered a romance in Adeline's well-ordered life.

"It's only a man I met last year in Scotland staying at the Parhams. Mr. Green, a tea-planter from Assam!" Adeline answered with a badly assumed air of indifference, as she handed Marica the photograph—a snapshot of a tall, well-made man with a delightful face, holding a fishing-rod.

Marica examined it with interest—no one half so attractive had ever appeared amongst the Morecambe

girls' Sunday afternoon callers!

"Oh, Adeline, what a charming person!"

"Do you think so really?" Adeline said with shy

eagerness.

"Of course I do—and so do you!" laughed Marica. "Adeline! I believe you're in love with him!" she added impulsively.

- "Oh, don't say that!" Adeline cried plaintively.
- "But I do say it! And how glorious for you to have a grande passion!"
 - "Not when it's for the wrong person!"
- "But why is Mr. Green the wrong person? Is he married already?"
 - "Oh, no!" Adeline said, looking quite shocked.
 - "Does he drink? swear? gamble?"
- "How absurd you are, Marica! Of course, it's nothing of that kind. Dicky—Mr. Green, I mean, is perfectly splendid in himself, only you see it would be such a disappointment to Mother if I married anyone like that. It isn't as if he was one of the Greens that she knows all about—"
 - "Who are the Greens?"
- "Lord Egremont's name is Green, you see. But I believe Mr. Green's father is a retired colonel who lives at Cheltenham—no one anybody has ever heard of."
- "But what does that matter?" Marica asked blankly.

The standard of values by which these people measured each other was perfectly unintelligible to her. If "breeding" had determined anybody's social status, she could have understood, for Mr. Fayne was no democrat, his mentality was too far removed from that of the uneducated classes to find any affinity with them, and the Aunts in Queen's Gate were equally aloof from any class beside their own. But to them a man was either a gentleman or not a gentleman—he could not be more if he was a duke. And since Mr. Green was obviously a gentleman,

what did it matter whether he belonged to the right

or wrong Green family?

But in answer to her question, Adeline only shook her head and murmured: "It's so difficult to explain things to you, Marica, you've been brought up so oddly!"

And then she abruptly changed the subject.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER the night of the banquet in Adeline's bedroom, the friendship between the two girls grew rapidly. Adeline, unlike her sister Augusta, was human at heart, with feelings only partially atrophied by the opinion of her world. Augusta suffered from no such complications; she was whole-heartedly intent on doing the best for herself, unhampered by sentimental considerations—as soon as the man with the right income and the right position presented himself, Augusta would be his without more ado. Adeline, though unable wholly to free herself from the conviction that to make a "good marriage" must be her rightful destiny, allowed herself to be diverted from her purpose by a foolish tendresse for the man from Assam, who had now returned to London and persisted in calling at Eaton Square in spite of Augusta's obvious disapproval.

"What am I to do?" Adeline asked Marica one

day helplessly after he had gone away.

And Marica, who had thought him even more delightful than he had appeared in the photograph, was at a loss for a reply. It is easy to marry if one is wholly worldly, or wholly romantic—Adeline was neither. And how is one to advise a girl who talks about "the Greens" yet sleeps with "Poems of Passion" by her bedside? So though, as the days went by, Adeline grew thinner and read Ella Wheeler Wilcox still more assiduously, she could not make up her mind to fly in the face of her world and declare her wish to marry the member of the wrong Green family.

In May Lady Morecambe came to a momentous decision. It was three years since she had given a dance—for Adeline's coming out—Captain More-

cambe's increasing expenses in the Guards having since then absorbed most of the family's resources. Freddy was the Morecambes' one extravagance. Battling with the necessity of holding their own with people who owned twice or three times their income, they never grudged the money that went to keep up Freddy's position in the world of London. The girls might make patient, uncomplaining pilgrimages to little dressmakers in Bayswater or Chelsea, Lady Morecambe might limit her expenditure on carriages or motors, but Freddy must keep as many polo ponies as his richer brother officers and get his clothes from Poole.

But now something must be done for the girls; for the invitations they received to other people's dances were slowly dwindling. A dance must be given for them! And having come to this decision the problem of collecting dancing men had to be confronted.

The day of the Tango had not yet dawned, nor had the lure of the "Turkey Trot" begun to draw London's manhood in its hundreds to the ballrooms they had so long avoided. Moreover Lady Morecambe was not one of the fortunate hostesses who had succeeded in making her house the fashion, and it was necessary therefore to summon the social lights of her world to aid her in the execution of her plan. Mr. Erdington of the Pelican Club was called in to the rescue with his following of bachelors, Major Marcham was requested to beat up young men from every quarter, and Colonel Vermont was consulted with regard to the supper arrangements.

"But, my dear Lady Morecambe!" Major Marcham expostulated when the project was put before him, "you should have engaged the Ritz long

ago!"

"I intend to give the dance here!" Lady Morecambe said firmly. And nothing would move her from her purpose. She had no intention of pandering to the whims of the young man of the day; she would give her dance in her own house and have the supper prepared by her own cook who had been in the family

nineteen years.

And then she and her daughters set to work on the invitations. The task was a strenuous one. It was obviously impossible to invite all the endless girls of their acquaintance, but which were to be left out? Lady Morecambe was really the kindliest of women and she could not easily adopt a policy wholly foreign to her nature and bargain for a return of her hospitality. Some women of her world, she knew, did not hesitate to make the frank proposition: "If you will ask my girls to your dance I will ask yours to mine." Nor could she bring herself to become suddenly afflicted with blindness on encountering in the street the women who did not give dances, for weeks before her own ball. And so she fell an easy prey to the pachydermatous, and by the time the momentous date arrived had allowed herself to be bothered into far exceeding her original limit of only eighty girls.

"But, Mother, you will ask Marica, won't you?"

begged Adeline.

"Of course I should like to. But——" Lady Morecambe murmured distressfully.

"It would be only one girl more!" urged Adeline.

"Haven't we said 'Only one girl more' a dozen times already?"

"Yes, I know, but I can't bear the idea of leaving out Marica!"

"No, please don't leave out Miss Fayne!" interposed Major Marcham who happened to be present at the discussion.

"Well, Adeline, you must ask her to be sure to bring a man!" Lady Morecambe said with a sigh.

Marica, receiving the invitation, was filled with mingled joy and despair. "Come and bring a man!" was the perpetually recurring injunction she was never able to obey. What man could she bring? She knew none outside the Morecambe's own circle except Peter Trent, and how could she invite him? To

begin with she had no idea of his address, and besides this she had only met him three times in her life. How could she suddenly write and invite him to go with her to a dance?

"I'm afraid I can't possibly bring a man, Adeline!" she said helplessly, when she met her friend on the

doorstep of Woolland's.

"Never mind, dear Marica, come all the same!" Adeline answered quixotically, with a squeeze of her hand

And in the end it was settled she should go. Mrs. Darset good naturedly volunteered to chaperone her, and Major Marcham undertook to look after her at the ball.

At last the momentous night—a perfect summer night in early June—arrived. A crowd of people struggled upwards under arches of pink roses to the head of the stairs where Lady Morecambe stood receiving her guests in a state of mind no one could have guessed to be bordering on frenzy. Her smile of greeting to each superfluous girl was nothing short of heroic; whilst to the infrequent young man she extended only a handshake and the same formal smile when she would fain have fallen on his neck and hugged him with gratitude for putting in an appearance.

"Ah, how de do, Mrs. Stanforth!" as a mother and two plain girls with freckles and white eye-lashes came smiling up the staircase. "So glad to see you. And is this your youngest daughter?"

"Yes, this is Pamela. As my boy, whom you were so kind as to invite, had another engagement, I felt sure you would not mind Pamela taking his

place!"

Lady Morecambe's smile should have won her a V.C. on the spot. "Delighted!" she murmured, as she shook hands with the girl who emerged from behind her imperturbable parent.

A woman whose husband had a cold and could not come was the next arrival; to be followed by a young

man who did not dance, and then more girls who did; a moment later came an elderly bon-vivant who invariably spent the evening in the supper-room, then Mrs. Draycott and Birdie. Birdie had never been crude enough to enjoy going to parties. Society was her métier, and she went into it with the unquestioning matter-of-factness of a bank clerk going to the City. With her mother to do battle for her, she was able to sail through life imperturbably removed far above the sea of emotions on which other girls tossed helplessly.

"Augusta!" Lady Morecambe said in an agonised whisper to her eldest daughter during a lull in the tide of arrivals, "this is too awful! How many more

girls?"

"Why did you ask Mrs. Draycott and Birdie,

Mother?" Augusta answered with a shrug.

"Oh, my dear, what could I do? You know how persistent Mrs. Draycott is—"

"Other people have the nerve to resist her!"

Lady Morecambe sighed. She was a gentle creature, no match, she knew, for Mrs. Draycott's methods of attack. The woman who is afraid of hurting another woman's feelings is always at a disadvantage with one who has no feelings to be hurt.

"There is nothing to be lost by asking," was the

"There is nothing to be lost by asking," was the ruling maxim of Mrs. Draycott's career, and experience showed her that indeed a great deal was often to

be gained.

This evening as she took up her customary place with Birdie in the doorway of the ballroom, where no arriving man could possibly escape her, she had once more reason to congratulate herself on the triumph of the maxim in question.

Under cover of the music and the clamour of voices she discoursed in undertones to her daughter. "Look, Birdie, there is Mrs. Anstruther, who was so nice to us last year in Scotland, do remember to bow to her!"

"Oh, Mother, how silly you are! What is the good of bowing to Mrs. Anstruther? You've for-

gotten her last daughter was married the other day—she certainly won't give any more balls now!"

"Quite right, darling, I forgot. Oh, there is Marica Fayne arriving! How very plain she looks in that white gown! Poor thing, she has gone off terribly since that time when Sir Charles Frimley paid her so much attention. It must have been a great disappointment to her. But of course money isn't everything. Men are often afraid of girls who spend so much on their clothes! Oh, dear, she is coming this way, I do hope she isn't going to fasten herself on to us."

And Mrs. Draycott turned a resolute profile towards the new arrival.

But Marica took up her stand against the wall at a little distance behind Mrs. Draycott's shoulder. She loved to be near these two at parties—their manœuvres

always filled her with delight.

A few men were at last beginning to arrive, and Mrs. Draycott's attention was now rivetted on the doorway. As each manly form made its way through the crowd the intrepid little woman darted forward with an out-stretched hand of greeting. Above the sound of the string band which had now broken into an inspiring waltz tune, her voice, sharp at the edges as a file, could be heard accosting them in turn.

"Oh, Lord Crawley, how delightful to see you! Hardly any of Birdie's partners are here to-night! All rather elderly here, aren't they? So refreshing to see a young man at last!.... How de do, Mr. Linvale.... Yes, we have been away for a week down the river, poor Birdie was quite done up... so many dances the week before, and then of course dancing all night as Birdie does! The men simply will not let her rest!.... Ah! Captain Darvel! You know my daughter, don't you.... Going on to Lady Egremont's, are you? No, we're not, Lady Morecambe begged us to stay on here. How de do, you remember Birdie, don't you, Sir Henry?.... No, she's not married yet, girls are

so picksome nowadays, aren't they? There is no pleasing them! Well, Colonel Crayford, energetic as ever, I see! Given up dancing? Oh, what nonsense, of course you're not too old! Plenty of girls prefer men of your age. Birdie now can't bear young men-she says they've no conversation . . . A pretty girl? Where? Against the wall?" and Mrs. Draycott following the direction of the man's eves, turned her own, hard and black as boot buttons, on Marica. Her voice sank lower, yet a fragment of her reply was caught by the keen ears of the girl, who in a filmy white gown and myrtlewreathed brown hair, looked like some nymph that had strayed from an Arcadian woodland within the cab radius.

"Ah, over there?" Mrs. Draycott's voice could be heard saying, and Marica guessed that her own name followed. "... yes, she is not bad looking, is she? She was quite pretty a year or two ago no, not much in London. I don't quite know where from I believe I heard some mention of Dieppe these people do go everywhere, don't

they nowadays?"

"How awful it must be to feel like that," thought Marica. "Society must be such a frightful struggle if one takes it so seriously—really far more strain on the system than taking in washing!" She began to understand now the reason of the hungry look on so many of these women's faces. One must struggle so desperately if one did not wish literally to go to the wall. And through it all one must smile! At all costs one must look successful!

"Nothing succeeds like success" is a maxim that society has lately laid fervently to heart. Thirty years ago it was the fashion to look bored. "smart man" of 1880 stepped languidly into his private hansom and declared himself to be "awfully bored "at having to go and dance. "Smart" women yawned ostentatiously behind their fans. Girls declared themselves wearied with society. But nous avons change tout ça! Nowadays no self-respecting young man goes anywhere he doesn't want to. Women who get enough invitations to be able to indulge in the luxury of going nowhere also stay away. The rest go—and smile. At all costs one must appear triumphant—eternally on the crest of the wave!

To-night the girls who stood out against the walls were all resolutely smiling as if they asked no more of life than to spend the midnight hours propped against Lady Morecambe's dado-whilst the men herded together in the doorway for the purpose of self-protection. Such men too! Where in the world had Lady Morecambe discovered them? Men with bald pink heads and bulging waistcoats, boys with embryo moustaches and bulbous noses, little young men with retreating chins and meekly plastered hair, fat men with creases round the backs of their necks, thin men with feeble mouths and sloping shoulders, some nervous and smiling, others plethoric and resentful, but nearly all with the trapped look of the wild animal that finds itself lured from its native wilds into a hampering captivity.

One young man standing behind Marica was greeted by a pal in an agonised undertone:

"I say, Dicky, let's get out of this and go off to

the Ritz.'

"Rather! Whose night is it?"

"Can't remember, but supper's sure to be all right."

And they made a stealthy exit.

Only two or three of the crowd of men looked frankly at their ease—Mr. Erdington who loved dancing with all the fervour of a débutante, and Mr. Balcombe, to whose catlike love of comfort the "call of the wild" made no appeal.

Mr. Erdington, his head on one side, strutted down the row of waiting maidens, and fixing on the prettiest he quacked out a request for a dance. It was accepted with barely concealed rapture. Meanwhile, Mr. Balcombe, who had unwarily detached himself from the phalanx in the doorway, felt himself grasped by the coat sleeve. A moment later he realised that he had asked Birdie Draycott to dance, when he found her clinging to his shoulder in the thick of the dancers.

It was really very amusing, standing here and watching them all, thought Marica. There was Mr. Courtney Vincent arriving, steering his way skilfully between Scylla and Charybdis—Mrs. Draycott on one side and Lady Fakenham with two of her girls on the other! Ah! he had passed them both. Mr. Courtney Vincent was an expert in the art of avoiding people's eyes without actually cutting them. Not for this diplomatist the clumsy story about short-sightedness—he knew without looking, when to turn his head casually in the opposite direction. He paused now, taking in the room at a glance, and mentally deciding that at present there was no one smart enough to dance with.

In one corner of the ballroom the stalwart form of Sadie B. Funk was surrounded as usual by a phalanx of black coats all clamouring for dances, which she

was loudly refusing.

"No, that I won't!" she screamed in the tones at which London smiled indulgently but Washington had shuddered, as she looked down at the sleek head of a young man on a level with her muscular shoulder, "I tell you I'm 'bout tired of inhaling hair-oil, I am! Sir Charles Frimley's more the size for me! Yes, come right on, Sir Charles!" she shouted cheerfully, her blonde cendré head turned to watch his barge-like progress through the crowd. "I'll give you a turn before Momma and I go on to the Marchioness of Egremont's. We're booked for that next."

Putting her arm through his she moved away and

the crowd of black coats dispersed.

Sadie's popularity was now firmly established. Sir Charles Frimley, who she declared to be "a dandy man," was usually to be found in her drawing-room on Sunday afternoons where she plied him with corn cakes and dough nuts.

But even the most grotesque of human comedies

must pall if one is alone to enjoy it.

Marica began to wonder wearily if she would have to stand here all the evening. She knew only about three amongst the motley crowd of men, and Adeline had told her that it was quite "impossible" to introduce at balls. Nobody did it. The men would not stand it for a moment.

There was of course no one in the room middle-class enough to ask for an introduction; the London man never for a moment loses sight of the fact that the people he already knows are the only people really worth knowing.

There was nothing to be done but to stand and wait or choose the alternative of slipping out of the room, down the stairs and home to bed! The minutes passed; still she stood on wearily, a lump of lonely misery rising in her throat.

It was the most miserable experience of her whole life, and in vain she summoned all her philosophy to

enable her to bear it with serenity.

The working girl, clinging to a strap in the underground, because none of the men seated around her care to offer her a place, suffers no such humiliation—she has not come there to please them, her presence has its raison d'être as worthy as their own. But the girl standing out at a ball can find no support in such consoling reflections—she is there to please, to attract, and finally to be danced with, and it would be futile to pretend she has come for any other purpose.

"I can't bear it any longer!" Marica said to herself, and she moved hastily forward to make her

way out of the room.

But a short, square form impeded her progress.

"Ah, Miss Fayne! I've been looking for you everywhere!"

It was Major Marcham beaming up into her face. "Have you really?" she answered lightly, half

amused yet grateful to anyone in this indifferent crowd for remembering her existence.

"And now I hope you are going to give me a

dance?" he begged persuasively.

As he led her out into the middle of the room not a few envious eyes were focussed on her. To be asked to dance by Major Marcham was no small distinction. But dancing, Marica discovered, was out of the question. In the few available square yards left to the dancers by the crowd of onlookers it was only possible to rotate a few times on one's own axis before one was nearly felled to the ground by another couple. And now Sir Charles and Miss Funk, hurtling round with the assurance of a motor omnibus amongst the frailer traffic, made the attempt more than usually perilous.

"Rumty tumty, rumty tumty, tum-tum-tum," cried the band, and away went one's feet then—bump——

"Oh Miss Fayne, did that couple hurt you?"

"Not much, thank you!"

Off again.

"Rumty-tumty---"

"Oh, I beg your pardon—" This from the male portion of a passing couple. "I'm afraid that was your shoulder?"

"I didn't feel it, thank you. Yes, the room is

rather crowded."

"Shall we try again?"

"Oh, certainly" Cr-r-r-p!

"I'm so sorry," purred Birdie Draycott, "I think the lace of your frock has caught on the buckle of my shoe!"

"Please don't mind tearing it-it's there on pur-

pose."

And Birdie with a bunch of lace on her foot danced on smiling.

At the end of five minutes, with aching toes and

stinging elbows, Marica begged for respite.

"We'll go and sit out, shall we?" said Major Marcham.

"Yes, yes, anywhere out of this!"

As they found two chairs in a recess on the landing he glanced appreciatively at the girl beside him. was a connoisseur in girls, this little man who had danced through thirty London seasons with undiminished ardour, and this one with her dreamy grey eyes and air of unreality was so unlike the capable matterof-fact girls of the day usually to be met at dances!

"How is it," he said with some curiosity, "that we've never happened to meet at a dance before?"

"I never go to dances," she answered simply.

No, he had gathered something of the kind from the Morecambe girls' conversation, and being a thoroughly kind-hearted little man was filled with pity at her forlornness.

"You were never meant to play Cinderella, you know!" he said, nodding his head sagaciously.

She gave a little smiling shrug of the shoulders. "Someone told me the other day I was Cinderella

with everything except the fairy godmother!"
"Then you must let me play fairy godfather!" he said quickly. "Will you allow me to introduce people to you to-night?"

"How kind of you!" she said.

He was as good as his word, and when the next dance began, hurried round collecting partners from every corner with the ease of a conjurer producing rabbits out of a silk hat. Marica noticed with amusement that these young men, who, she had been assured, would never submit to being introduced to anyone by their hostess, displayed a lamb-like docility in the hands of Major Marcham and asked for dances with an empressement that filled her with wondering surprise.

"What should I have done without my fairy godfather?" she said later in the evening to Major Marcham when, after having danced every dance, in the interval she found his head touching her shoulder in the crowd. He looked up, radiating satisfaction. What a kind little man he was! She hated herself at that moment for ever having thought him funny!

And so the hours flew by until one o'clock when, as she was in the midst of a belated supper, an unexpected contretemps occurred, for a passing waiter, making his way through the crowd, allowed a strawberry ice to shoot off its plate on to Marica's gown, leaving a creamy smear in its track. There was nothing for it but a hasty flight to the upper regions of the house in search of a sponge and towel to repair the damage.

On reaching the third floor landing she looked about for the bathroom, and acting on her previous experience of London houses, opened the right door with unerring instinct.

It was the bathroom, but—it was not empty. As she entered a white chiffon figure rose hastily from the edge of the bath where it had been seated. It was Adeline—Adeline in her new dancing frock, with pale cheeks and eyes red with weeping. In her hand a small lace handkerchief was crumpled into a damp The two girls faced each other silently. Adeline in confusion, Marica in surprise.

"Adeline! What are you doing here? What has

happened?"

Adeline turned her face away and sank down again limply on the edge of the bath. Marica seated herself sympathetically beside her. What could it be? Was Adeline after all regretting the rejected tea planter?

"Adeline, do tell me what is the matter?"

But at the words of sympathy Adeline's shoulders began to heave anew and a sob broke from her incontrollably.

"It's only that—that—I couldn't bear it any

longer."

"Bear what any longer?"
A slight pause. "Having no partners!" came at last in stifled tones.

"Oh, you poor darling!" Marica cried, giving her friend a hug. "You came and hid yourself in the bathroom because no one asked you to dance?"

"Isn't that reason enough? It's so absolutely

awful standing out at a ball ""

"I know. There is nothing else in life quite so humiliating—one just longs for the parquet to open and engulf one. But why did you come here? Why not go to bed immediately instead of perching on this horrid bit of wood?" asked Marica, wriggling into a bearable position between Captain Morecambe's soap-bowl and loofah, and beginning to sponge her gown at the tap.

"I couldn't go to bed. Sir Charles and Sadie are

sitting out in my bedroom."

"I see. That does make it awkward. Still, it's not festive in here—" and she looked round the room in which hot water cans and the Morecambe

family bath towels formed the sole decoration.

But at this Adeline's tears broke out anew. "What does that matter?" she sobbed, "at any rate there is no one here to see one—B-Birdie Draycott or Lady Fakenham, or any of them. Oh! Marica, I stood out three whole dances—only think of it! Several men I know quite well never asked me for a single dance!"

"How perfectly sickening of them!"

All the chivalry towards her own sex which is the strongest characteristic of the modern woman filled Marica as she looked at Adeline. The fact that she herself—owing to Major Marcham's intervention—had not been left long standing out, weighed little with her, for she had none of the sublime egotism of the girl trained to society who, as long as she herself has a good time, feels nothing but a careless contempt for her less fortunate companions. She hated these men here to-night for neglecting her friend.

"Adeline," she broke out impatiently, "why is it that we submit to the system on which dances are arranged?—to standing out in rows to be danced with or left according to the caprices of our men acquaintances? Imagine if other entertainments were worked on the same principle!—if at tennis parties, bridge parties, women had to stand and wait until some man

came and invited them to play! But at dances we're simply at their mercy—they can pick us out or leave us up against the wall till morning if they choose! Why aren't dances organized like other parties—since men don't play the game but merely take advantage of the power we give them?"

She thought of the men herded together at the entrance to the ballroom, apparently oblivious to the fact that they had been invited there to dance. She knew that there were others who drove to the first awning and having supped peacefully, departed without ever penetrating to the ballroom. She remembered the faithless seven at the Caledonian ball and Augusta's helpless answer to her own indignant comment: "There are always so many women only too glad to have them at any price!" and her whole being rose in revolt at the situation.

"What place is there for a self-respecting woman in this world we call society?" she cried with sudden vehemence. "We're made so desperately cheap! Men don't discriminate between us—they think we're all like Mrs. Draycott, frantic to secure them. A woman in our world hires a motor omnibus or runs a special train to collect Guardsmen for her dances, and the Guardsmen hire an electric launch to take the chorus down the river! We have to spoil them, coax them, feed them, pay for them—or do without them! Ah—and why not do without them?" she ended with a laugh.

"How can we?" Adeline said helplessly, "we can't do without them. Society couldn't get on without them!"

"Then why not get on without society?"

Suddenly this world of society, that from the outside had seemed so gay and careless and that she had longed so passionately to enter, seemed to her unendurable. How could women go on leading this life which to all but the few who happened to make themselves the fashion, was one of eternal piping to men who did not care to dance and of spreading feasts for people who did not want to dine? Why not abandon the attempt?—give up the played-out farce of the London season and take to gardening or chicken farming, and forget that such a lusus naturae as the London man exists?

"Why not cut loose and give up society?" she repeated vehemently.

But it was now the turn of Adeline to be roused to

eloquence.

"Oh, Marica!" she cried with flushed cheeks, "How could we afford to give up society? It's all we were brought up for—to look nice, to go to everything, to be a success and in the end to marry well. You don't understand because you weren't brought up to it as we were. And besides you're independent—you'll have your own money, you've nothing to dread in the future. But for us! Think what it means not to marry! A few hundreds to live onnearly everything will go, of course, to Freddy."

Marica was silent, realising for the first time the strange custom which later on would make these girls the poor relations of their elder brother.

"But it's not only that—it's the emptiness, the loneliness one dreads—the having nothing to live for," Adeline went on.

"Yes, I know, we all want our niche in the world, someone, something that couldn't get on without us. But couldn't you do something, Adeline, take up some profession?"

The books and papers of the day were full of the increasing emancipation of woman, of the wide field

of activities now open to her.

"We don't belong to the world in which women take up professions!" Adeline said helplessly. "We're all expected to marry—and then by the time we've realized we're never going to it's too late to take up anything else, however much we might want to."

"Yes, yes, that's awful. I never thought of it

before. But, Adeline, in your case it's quite easy-you can marry, you must marry Mr. Green!"

Adeline shook her head. "Oh, I couldn't!

Mother would feel it so dreadfully!"

Feel what? That was the question that puzzled Here in London were hundreds of girls waiting to be married; out in the colonies were hundreds of lonely men wanting wives; it seemed such a simple solution of the problem that they should supply the need in each other's lives. Yet it was a solution that the mothers of society would not contemplate! Why not? Because these men, probably the best of their kind, could not give their girls the positions for which they had been trained. For these girls were not trained to become wives but to become hostesses. They had learnt none of the practical things of life that would enable them to keep house on a small income but merely how to "entertain," the right order in which to send people in to dinner, the right people to ask to meet each other. They were expected not merely to marry but to marry brilliantly, and they could not face the opinion of their world if they failed to do so. It was not only her own mother but the other mothers of her world who would condemn Adeline for marrying the tea-planting member of the wrong Green family!

"Adeline!" Marica cried, "I'll tell you what's the matter with you! You're hypnotized, hypnotized by the opinion of all these other women. You feel you couldn't bear the line they'd take if you made what

they would call a 'bad marriage.'"

Ah, it was that, the terror of each other's opinions that drove women on eternally in the struggle! Men might imagine that it was the craving for their society which made these girls herd to balls and parties—it was just as much the fear of what other women would say if they stayed away. It has often been said that women dress not for men, but for each other, it is also for each other that they dine and dance and even marry. The joy of competition which men find in

work or sport the women of society experience in the struggle up the social ladder. To appear to other women to be a success is what they live for. And the ultimate goal towards which all these girls were striving was the glorious moment of announcing "I am engaged!" with the name of a coveted parti to follow. This, to these girls, was the "moment eternal" to which all their lives led up, and that was to make up for all the years of dreary boredom that might come after! It was not the parti himself they craved for so much as the triumph of having secured him. And just as many girls who are not afraid to face poverty lack the courage to face their friends' attitude towards poverty, so Adeline Morecambe, who was by nature socially unambitious, realized the opinion of her world if she married this unknown man from Assam whom no other girl in her set had wanted to annex. There would be no triumph in the announcement of her engagement. Birdie Draycott would smile derisively; Lady Fakenham would say: "Poor Adeline! I suppose that is the best she can do for herself now!" And Lady Susan would ask in her booming voice: "Who is this Mr. Green? Has one ever heard of him?" Oh, no, it was not to be thought of!

But Marica with a firm hand on her friend's quiver-

ing shoulder went on speaking.

"You simply can't sacrifice your one chance of happiness to the opinion of these people. Think what it means, Adeline, on one side the treadmill round of society that leads to nowhere, and on the other a glorious free life with a man whom you love, who adores you, who'll never bore you for a moment! How can you hesitate? Adeline, how can you?"

Adeline rose haltingly to her feet, uncertain whether to cast Marica angrily off or whether to fall on her neck and weep tears of pent-up emotion—the tiresome emotion that for months she had been trying not to feel, and that she had nearly succeeded in making herself believe she had entirely vanquished. If only

she managed to get over this she might live to dispose of her affections judiciously as the other well-regulated girls in her set were so conveniently able to do. But with Marica's clear voice ringing in her ears, and Marica's eager hand gripping her shoulder, the dead emotion stirred again. Down beneath the surface of her nature, numbed with the deadening policy of her world, primeval voices called to her. For the first time in her life Adeline felt she was not a jeune fille à marier, but a woman to be loved.

"Marica," she said with a quiver in her voice, "why is it you make one feel so differently about everything? When I'm with you the whole world seems another place—full of glorious possibilities. It's like a window being opened and gusts of fresh air blowing in on one!" she added with an imaginative-

ness she had never before displayed.

"It's not I, it's Nature, which society does its best to stifle. You've got to get back to Nature and be yourself if you want to be happy. And your way back is to write to Mr. Green and tell him that you'll be at home on Sunday. Will you?"

Adeline squeezed her friend's arm with a new impulsiveness. "Yes. I promise."

The two girls kissed each other, and five minutes later Marica was being driven home to bed.

CHAPTER XI.

And so it happened that in opening the door of the bathroom at 306 Eaton Square, Marica was brought face to face with one of the greatest social problems

of modern England.

The case of Adeline Morecambe, she realized, was not an isolated one; there must be hundreds of Adelines and Augustas in this world of London, pretty, nicely-dressed, but quite undistinctive girls going the round of dances and parties, appearing to their girl friends in the country to live in a whirl of the wildest gaiety, yet in reality driven by a necessity hardly less stern than that of the world that toils for bread.

The tragedy of the woman worker has been recounted ad infinitum; everyone is familiar with the struggles of the shop-girl or the unsuccessful artist to sustain life in an attic on buns and cocoa. But what of the girl in the class where, as Adeline had said, women are not supposed to have professions, to whom even the solace of daily work is denied?

Of course there are always "the poor." The woman with no particular raison d'être on her own account can fill her time by visiting a district or joining a needlework guild. But youth is not primarily philanthropic, the desire of life runs fiercely through its veins, it cannot find its sole vent in vicarious happiness.

The true history of Lady Clara Vere de Vere has probably yet to be written. Who knows what deadly London seasons led up to her desperate determination to break a few country hearts before embarking on another one? With nothing on earth to do but "pine amongst her halls and towers," meditating on the

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de Vere pedigree, the indignant swain who eluded her snare had no suggestion to make but that she should usurp the duties of the village school-mistress. Would he have suggested to an active young man, bursting with life and energy, to find the sole aim of his existence in teaching orphan boys the right

way to chop wood and hoe potatoes?

Woman of to-day has learnt a dread of futile occupation, she no longer finds a solution to the problem of existence in poker-work or embroidering antimacassars, she asks of life one thing only—to be necessary to someone or to something. Marriage in itself is not even enough for her; a satisfying occupation, one that she believes to be really worth whilemay make her happier than an unsatisfying husband, who, she feels, could get on quite as well without her. It is when in the end she fails to find this, an absorbing interest in life, that Nature, maddened by stagnation, takes its revenge; it is then that women write love letters to Paderewski or to Kitchener, break some unoffending tradesman's windows, or relapse into a melancholia that luxury serves rather to aggravate than to relieve.

But with such women, the intrepid leaders of the Woman movement have little sympathy. Why, they ask, did not these useless creatures take up a profession earlier in life? To the average social reformer, usually a member of the thinking, independent middle classes, such a course appears simplicity itself. It is quite easy for the daughter of a professional man to leave even a comfortable home in a suburb or a midland town and become a High School teacher or a hospital nurse. The number of professions open to women of the middle classes increase daily. But what of the girl in the class above her? What of the Lady Claras-brought up by mild, unaspiring governesses and late Victorian parents without a glimpse of the possibilities outside their own narrow horizon? What of the courage, physical and moral, required for a girl of twenty, living in luxury in Eaton

Square or Grosvenor Place to come down one morning in the middle of the season and announce her intention of becoming a lady gardener, or a chicken farmer? Or is she likely to become suddenly inspired with the desire to face the appalling strain of hospital work? Even if she has the courage, a new difficulty confronts her, for she finds herself in the position of a gentleman ranker, the butt of all the bullying instincts of the women in the world to which the woman worker usually belongs, who construe every difference of mannerism into "giving herself airs," and resent her attempt to take the bread out of needier mouths.

How would the average man who had been educated at Eton like to be offered his choice of becoming a male nurse, a district visitor, a High School teacher, a dog fancier, or a shop assistant? Yet these comprise most of the professions open to the same man's sisters if they wish to lead a life of independence.

Not one in a hundred has the temerity to accept such a means of escape from the path laid down for her by custom. Each girl in turn goes on hopefully, looking forward in spite of discouragements, to the natural solution of her destiny—a brilliant marriage. What though the first six seasons have brought no proposals, the seventh may break the spell and end with a hail of travelling clocks and silver muffineers and the triumphant chords of the Wedding March from Lohengrin!

To a girl of this class without any special talent the "increasing emancipation of woman" has meant nothing—marriage often remains, as it did thirty years ago, the only solution to the problem of her existence.

And yet these girls have probably of all women in the world the least chance of marrying. The French girl in the same class has a marriage—often wisely—arranged for her by her parents; the American girl has unlimited men friends amongst whom to make her choice. And in London the happier girl of the working classes—the shop girl or the "mannequin"—meets men at every turn. But to the girl not in the

gayest, but in the most exclusive sets of society, few such possibilities are offered. The segregation of the sexes is the strangest feature of her world. Her brothers and their friends, trained from infancy to believe that to avoid all risk of being bored is the first duty of man, betake themselves to more amusing and less exclusive circles, or to Eve-less Edens in St. James's Street and East Africa. The result is a world in the heart of Western civilization where hundreds of girls lead lives as aimless and unsatisfying as any desenschantées on the shores of the Bosphorus. Around the true facts of their existence a conspiracy of silence has been ordained—not one in fifty would admit she was not the success she hoped to be.

Marica, going in to tea at Eaton Square a few days later, was hardly surprised to hear Adeline, in response to Birdie Draycott's enquiries, speak in gentle tones of rapture about her enjoyment of the dance, for Adeline, she knew, was merely playing the game of society as she had been taught to play it. Just as in the world of trade, business must always seem to be flourishing, so in the world of society one

must never admit to reverses.

And then Mrs. Draycott took up the tale and recounted the numbers of partners to whom Birdie had been obliged to refuse dances.

The arrival of Mrs. Darset a little later created a diversion; she was received with the little flutter of appreciation that a woman who may be expected shortly to send out invitations to a popular country

house, is likely to inspire.

And then again the door opened, this time to admit a really charming vision with blue eyes that smiled serenely as she responded to Lady Morecambe's rather absent-minded greeting. Marica, looking across the room at the lovely face framed in prematurely grey hair, turned impulsively to Augusta who sat beside her and enquired in an undertone: "Oh, Augusta, do tell me, who is that delightful woman?"

"That?" Augusta answered, following the direc-

tion of Marica's eyes, "oh, that is only Miss Carruthers."

"Why only?" Marica asked with a smile.

"Well, I mean she doesn't do anything, you see!" Augusta answered indifferently.

"Do anything? Sing or paint or that sort of thing? But isn't it enough to be as beautiful as that?"

"She is good looking, I suppose. And as a matter of fact I believe she does paint rather well. And she travels a great deal. Mother met her at Cannes on her way back from Africa where she had been camping out for months. She likes doing that sort of thing-travelling all alone in wild parts of the world, you know."

"But I thought you said she didn't do anything?"

"Oh, I mean she doesn't do anything in Londongive any parties, entertain at all—"' I see."

She was silent, thinking of the plain spinster of forty whose inability even to provide a supper did not deter the flower of Parisian intellects from crowding to the little house in the Rue de Belle-Chasse more than a hundred years ago, and she asked herself wonderingly: "How far have we progressed since those far-off days? What has civilization done for us?"

Soon after she got up to go, and once outside the house drew in three deep breaths of air as she walked along the street in the direction of the Park. She must take a long walk before returning to Blenheim Gardens; air, space, movement were what she wanted in order to throw off the feeling of oppression that had come to her in Lady Morecambe's drawing-room.

Ah, why did people call society frivolous? If only it were frivolous! At this moment she could have found it in her heart to love the gambling baronets and flirting countesses of Canon Burnleigh's sermons and Mr. Sutro's dramas—they at least were human, creatures of impulse, on whom it was absurd to waste rhetoric.

But society, as she knew it, was nothing less than frivolous—earnest purpose, stern determination were its watchwords. No strolling here along the primrose path of idle fancies, no easy dalliance or yielding to whimsical inclinations, only the following of a planned campaign with set teeth beneath one's smiling lips.

Just as on that first Sunday at Grundisburgh House she realized her own helplessness amongst these other women. How alert they were compared to her! Whilst she was wondering about personalities, dreaming of affinities, they at a glance summed up the possibilities of any situation; every new acquaintance was weighed immediately in the scale of utility and no further attention or civility was wasted on those found wanting; every house they entered was the object of some purpose or else a stepping-stone to further designs. People talked of "climbers"—as if they were a class apart, but in society as it has now become, it seemed to her that everyone is a climber, that the whole of society is one vast climb upwards!

What a struggle! What a weariness!

Ah, how she longed to be out of it all, back at the Villa Bel Riposo, on the arid heights of St. Jean du

Loup—anywhere out of the fray!

The tumult of her mind drove her feet onwards, and she found herself walking rapidly, unseeingly through the green spaces of the Park. Out here under the trees, with the blue sky above one, she

could think, breathe freely

What would become of her if she continued on the path laid down for her? No man for whom one could feel any romance would, she felt sure, ever cross it, and she pictured herself at forty, living on at Blenheim Gardens, a mild, well-read and sprightly spinster, like dear Aunt Harriet with a manqué life behind her, about whom people wondered why she had never married. Perhaps if she worked very hard she might become the fashion, earn the label

"interesting" by means of carefully adopting a new craze every season. And age, she reflected, might bring its compensations. Nature might come to her aid and make her greedy, she might learn to live in time, like Colonel Vermont, for the pleasures of the table. Or she might become parochial—adopt a Canon Burnleigh of her own and find wild dissipation in drawing-room meetings. And so on, on interminably, until one day her acquaintances, glancing at the first column of the *Morning Post*, between sips of hot coffee and nibbles of crisp toast, would remark casually: "So poor old Miss Fayne is dead—dear me, how sad! Pass the sugar, please!"

The thought of her own meagrely attended funeral had just brought the tears welling into her eyes, when out of the blurred world before her, there loomed a

tall, loose-limbed figure.

"Oh, it's you?"

There was no time to blink away the tears before

she looked up to recognize Peter Trent.

She gave him her hand, "I didn't see you--I was distraite, thinking—tell me," she added in a lighter key, as he turned and walked silently beside her, "what have you been doing since we met last?"

"Working as usual," he said simply.

"Ah, you're lucky!"
"You think so?"

"Of course. Work is the one thing for which men are to be envied."

"You don't want the vote then?"

"No," she said with a laugh. "The vote won't make women any happier, it's a raison d'être we all want!"

He did not answer, but with a gesture indicated an

iron seat beneath a sycamore tree.

With a smile she accepted the suggestion and they sat down together in silence. Marica closed her eyes and gave a sigh of relief. This was peace at last. No smart crowds ever penetrated to this end of the Park: only grey London sheep browsed idly and

ragged children encamped in groups beneath the trees.

All at once she felt soothed and happy.

Peter Trent was the only person she had ever met in the world that calls itself society, who seemed to understand. But his appearances there were all too transitory—no doubt he found this world as wearisome as she did. Encouraged by his sympathetic silence she found herself at last telling him all that she was feeling, putting into words the passion of revolt that filled her.

"How can one ever be oneself, leading this life?" she said desperately, "for all the things that really matter—for beauty, friendship, sympathy, even humour—these people have no use whatever. One's got to learn to look at life as they do-to them it is no wonderful adventure, no mystery, no problem, but just a huge bargain sale at which to snatch the best things for oneself as women snatch from each other at the counters. They've all been trained to it from infancy, all learnt how to fight and hold their own. One sees that at children's parties-I went to one in the winter at Mrs. Burnleigh's and there were tiny children there, hard-eved babies of five, going round annexing the best presents and crackers with a determination that made one realize how splendidly they would be able to hold their own in after life! never learnt it—never!"

She threw out her arms with a helpless gesture. "And I don't want to learn it!" she cried with sudden vehemence.—"I'd rather drop out than scheme and contrive or—adopt the methods of Cynthia Brinton. That's the only alternative!"

"Tell me," she went on more quietly after a pause, "aren't there any people in London who live peacefully? real people who think and feel and don't bother about 'getting on'? I don't feel I'd care what they were if only they'd be human—if only they'd like things and people for themselves."

Peter Trent listened immovably. That was what made him so restful—his willingness to let one have

one's say, thought Marica, as she paused at last and

waited for him to speak.
"Of course," he said quietly after a moment's silence, "there are people in London here and there, perhaps in twos and threes, such as you describe, but they don't move in herds. The whole object of 'herding,' you see, is to avoid thinking. In society one must never allow oneself to speculate or wonder."

As he spoke his eyes rested pensively on the browsing grey sheep that wandered over the dry grass before

him, and in the same quiet voice he added:

"Look at these sheep. Do you blame them because they do not crave for fresh pastures, wonder whether better grazing is to be had elsewhere? The people you have been amongst are simply sheep—with sheep's mentalities, sheep's instincts, the sheep's submission to following along the track chosen for them by the bell-wethers. Have you ever watched a flock of sheep herding along a track? Do you know the way they push and hustle to follow in each other's footsteps-the passionate energy with which they fight to get through the same gap in the hedge? They never dream of looking for another! Their one instinct is to cling together, to herd along the same track, however narrow, to wear themselves out in efforts to keep to it rather than strike out for themselves fresh paths into the unknown. These people are just the same—a few are bell-wethers, the rest follow blindly----'

She leant forward eagerly. "Yes, yes, how true that is!"

As he talked the time-honoured simile seemed suddenly to acquire a fresh significance; she saw this London world which had seemed to her so fierce and formidable now revealed to her in all its primitive simplicity, as a long straight sheep track on which a herd of sheep pattered submissively in the wake of the bell-wethers. And she saw that what had seemed to her strenuousness was only the frenzied instinct to keep to the track, that their defensiveness and agression were merely the dread of being pushed from the path of safety, that what she had called their snobbishness was simply a submissive deference to those whom

they accepted as bell-wethers.

"One of the most cherished beliefs of the sheep track of society," Peter continued, "is the belief in its progressiveness. Even its so-called craze for novelty is only sheeplike. It loves to take to itself the indictment against the Athenians of always seeking after some new thing, yet as a matter of fact it will accept nothing new until it has been given the lead by some prominent bell-wether, when it will follow rejoicing in the belief that it is being daringly original. A new prophet must lecture at Claridge's under the patronage of duchesses if he wishes the world to hang upon his lips; a new health reformer must induce a celebrity to lunch at his restaurant if he hopes to convert humanity to his diet system; a new wit must have convulsed smart dinner-tables for the world to smile at his bons-mots. It doesn't matter where the bell-wether leads, the sheep will follow. Not one in a hundred does a thing because he really likes it, expresses an opinion because he really thinks it, seeks out anyone because they really appeal to him, or even laughs because he is really amused. It is all the Sheep Track."

She listened, her eyes alight with comprehension. "And off the Sheep Track?" she asked at last breath-

lessly.

"Off the Sheep Track," he said slowly, "there is life, but the way is thorny. To leave it is often to perish miserably!"

She rose to her feet with a laugh. "I shouldn't mind the thorns—I want to feel life, even if it hurts!"

And that evening as she sat thinking over all that Peter Trent had said, she knew that at the first opportunity that offered she was going to leave the Sheep Track.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY in the following October, soon after Marica's return from the Cornish fishing-village where, on account of its immunity from visitors, she and her father had spent the last part of the summer, Adeline Morecambe was married "quietly" to Mr. Green at a small unfashionable church in Ebury Street.

"I owe it all to you, Marica!" she had murmured, throwing her arms round her friend's neck before

starting for Assam with the radiant "Dicky."

It was the first bit of real romance that had ever come into Marica's life and she watched them go, with shining eyes, these two, who, in a world of prose, had found a fairyland in which nothing was real to them but each other and where the smiles and comments of Mrs. Draycott and her kind were only as the buzzing of fretful flies upon the window pane.

But with their departure Marica realized that her only human interest was gone and that there was now less inducement than ever to re-enter the world she

had come to think of as "the Sheep Track."

At this time of year, however, the Sheep Track was easily avoided, for the bell-wethers had not yet returned to town and only a few stragglers from the herd were to be seen from time to time in the streets on their

way from one country house to another.

And now that London had ceased temporarily to be the scene of their efforts, a new geniality crept into their manner. Marica, on bowing to Mr. Courtney Vincent in Knightsbridge, was rewarded by quite a cordial greeting and an enquiry as to whether they were likely to meet at any country houses; whilst Mr. Balcombe, whom she encountered stepping forth, freshly oiled and curled, from Truefitt's, had assumed an almost jaunty air and spoke enthusiastically of the weeks he had spent in Scotland. Marica longed to enquire whether the brown paper parcel containing shoes to change into had accompanied him on the moors, but nobly refrained from any rejoinder beyond: "How well you look!"

"Ah, yes," Mr. Balcombe agreed, "I'm feeling quite a different man—the air up there, you know! Like champagne—positively like champagne!" he

ended with daring originality.

"And the air is always there!" Marica answered with a smile. "Why not be oftener a different man, Mr. Balcombe, by going up to Scotland in May?"
But the Sheep Track has never been known to find

Scotch air a satisfactory substitute for its favourite beverage before the 12th of August, and Marica saw at once that she had shocked him. He took off his hat nervously and hurried on.

One day Mrs. Draycott actually found time to call on Marica and tell her of Birdie's triumphs at the country houses to which they were perpetually invited.
"I hope you have plenty of invitations too, Miss

Fayne?" she enquired anxiously.

"Oh, no, none at all at present."

"Dear me, how very disappointing for you! Birdie and I always say our autumn visits to the country are quite the pleasantest time of the year."

"I didn't know you were so fond of the country,

Mrs. Draycott."

"Ah, well, at country houses at this time of year one meets everyone of course--"

"Yes, I suppose so," Marica answered dreamily, and fell into a reverie on the habits of the Sheep-Track.

How submissively they followed the routine laid down for them! Abroad in the early spring, London in the season, Goodwood, Cowes, Scotland and now the round of the country houses.

Who shall sing the earnest purpose of the Sheep

Track—the indomitable courage of that Spartan herd? -of women who in London glide about in electric motors with cushioned seats exquisitely devised to minimize vibration, yet in response to the Alpine Sports fashion forsake their snug firesides to hurtle down frozen ice runs on rude toboggans, who bravely shoulder golf clubs or tramp in heavy boots with the guns over sodden turnip-fields; of men to whom London is as the breath of life, leaving the cosy armchairs at their clubs to fall heavily down snow slopes or crouch in butts upon a grouse moor! How many of the herd really experience the joy of all these things? How many really revel in the Alpine sunshine, really rejoice in the glow upon the heather, really feel the joy of sport? How long would they go on doing all these things if they ceased to be the fashion? But through it all the instinct of the Sheep Track leads them on—the conviction that what all the herd does must be worth doing.

And now the herd had wended southwards to English country houses standing amidst desolate gardens and decaying woodland, that during the loveliest seasons of the year were left to bring forth all their wealth of beauty unseen. One day, Marica wondered, would the bell-wethers discover that life is a better thing than death, that the June world of blazing flower borders and happy living things is more worth looking on at than the dealing of death-blows to all that is left of life in dead autumn woods? Sport she knew must be, the best and kindest of men often loved it, and she could imagine something of the sense of satisfied achievement that it brought them, but the women who looked on, without a tremor, who feasted gaily beside piles of feathered corpses were incomprehensible to her -her sympathies would always be with the wary bird winging its way to safety.

And so, when a few days later Mrs. Darset, up for a few days' shopping, met her in Sloane Street and invited her to one of her shooting parties in Yorkshire, Marica shook her head and murmured an excuse.

"It's very kind of you," she added gratefully, for she knew many girls asked no more of life than to be

asked to one of Mrs. Darset's house-parties.

"Oh, but do come, dear Miss Fayne," begged Mrs. Darset, "you are always so amusing! The men say you have such a sense of humour." And she looked at Marica curiously as if she were the possessor of some occult gift.

"But life is full of humour, don't you think so?" Marica answered, wondering whom she had been

destined to amuse this time.

Mrs. Darset sighed.

"Yes, I suppose so, but I'm not very good at seeing it. Things very seldom amuse me—that's where you seem to be so clever. You will come on the 15th really, won't you? I think Lord Windlesham will be one of the party," she added persuasively.

"The elusive Lord Windlesham?" Marica asked

with a smile.

"What a good name for him! Yes, he is elusive, I suppose, but he was an old friend of my husband's so I've never found him so. And the girls always adore him."

"Then I should probably quarrel with him!" laughed Marica who had all the modern woman's contempt for "lady-killers," and she refused the

invitation still more firmly.

But as the days went by she longed more than ever for friends to take the place of the acquaintances she had found so unsatisfying, for the real people she had spoken of to Peter Trent that day in the Park. And then she began to think about Peter, the odd-looking, ugly man who was nevertheless so curiously sympathetic. She wished she had not been taught by her father's system to worship beauty for then she would perhaps not have noticed that Peter's features were so out of drawing; as it was, each time she met him she found herself for the first few moments longing to rub out the lines and re-construct them more harmoniously. Yet when he began to talk, she forgot all about that

and fell at once under the spell of his mentality. She wished now that he would come and see her and then suddenly remembered that he had made her promise to let him know when she returned to London. On the impulse of the moment she seized a pen and wrote a note inviting him to tea.

He answered at once, accepting, and that was the first of many peaceful hours when the two friends sat over the fire philosophizing, with Balzac asleep on the hearthrug at their feet, growling at butcher boys in his

dreams.

"Isn't this better than the Sheep Track?" she said to him one evening with a smile, when they had finished discussing the volume of Lafcadio Hearn he had brought her the week before.

He smiled too—his slow infrequent smile—as he looked meditatively into the red glow of the fire.

"Have you ever thought," he said at last, "how many sheep-tracks there are? London is not one track, but a labyrinth of tracks, leading in all directions. As soon as you get off one you're almost bound to strike another. And so when one has lived some time in London and crossed many of the tracks one can usually tell, after five minutes' conversation, to which particular track the sheep one is talking to belongs."

"And all the tracks," she remarked, "have their

own bell-wethers!"

"And their sheep-dogs!"
"Sheep-dogs?" she asked.

"Yes, the people who have not the initiative to lead but who bark the sheep back on to the track if they show any signs of straying. They are always writing angrily to the papers to complain of any new idea, of anything that is not quite the same as it was in the days of their youth."

"Ah, I know!" Marica cried joyfully, "people like Canon Burnleigh. And how the sheep love being

barked at!"

"Because it gives them a feeling of security, con-

firms them in their conviction that the sheep track is the only path of safety. The religious sheep track is probably the one most fiercely adhered to; it was the followers of that track who rejected Christ and who, now that Christianity has itself become a sheep track, reject any strayers who seek to strike out new paths in search of truth. 'Can any good come out of Nazareth?' has been the cry of the sheep ever since the world began. To realize that good may come from any quarter is the first step towards the light."

And then they talked of other sheep tracks that compose the world of London-the sheep track of art, of so-called critics who rave about the exquisite lights and shades upon a canvas until some enterprising dealer with a rag and turpentine brings to light the name of an unknown artist in the corner, when they immediately cease their ravings and see no further merit in the picture; of the sheep track of humour, a whole theatre rocking with laughter at any joke, however hoary, in the mouth of some buffoon it has been taught to consider funny; of the sheep tracks literary and dramatic, on which originality is the thing least in request, where stock characters, stock situations alone are wanted.

"That is why England is the happy home of the plagiarist," said Peter, "to say what has been said before, to harp upon a theme with which it has already been made familiar is to go straight to the great heart of the British public. There is even," he went on after a pause, "the sheep track of unconventionality, for once a whimsical bell-wether has given the lead, the sheep join gaily in its antics. Once you begin to think of sheep tracks you see them everywherethe whole of life is sheep track."

She leant forward eagerly. "No, not life!" she said, "only existence! To leave the sheep track is to live!"

But how was one to set about this task of living? she asked herself as the days went by, where was she to find an outlet for the desire of life that consumed her?

Some words that she had read long ago in one of the old books at the Château came back to her: "Je remplis ma jeunesse pour que ma vieillesse ne puisse pas me reprocher de ne pas l'avoir employée!"

Yes, yes, one must fill one's youth with the things that belong to youth and youth alone, not forestalling the serenity of old age by taking life seriously. She thought of Aunt Harriet cheated of her youth—anything, she told herself, would be better than that. No woman, she told herself, is any use who has never had her fling, never during the few brief years of youth been really gay and frivolous and thoughtless!

But perhaps it was in the open air that one could use youth best? Many girls she knew from the magazines and books she now read, found an outlet for their activities in playing golf and riding to hounds. She would hate seeing anything killed, still, one could always shut one's eyes and try to forget the real object of the run . . . Yes, no doubt the excitement of the chase was a form of "living."

"Balzac!" she said one evening to the little dog who had deserted his habitual retreat beneath Léontine's bed to come and share a tea-cake with her over the fire, "shall we persuade Papa to go and live in the country? I could keep chickens—" she sighed a little, for the psychology of the poultry-yard did not at present appeal to her. "And you could go ratting—but you wouldn't like to leave the next door cat, I know."

Balzac, who was tired of waiting for another bit of tea-cake, sighed too. He was not in the least interested in Marica's suggestion. Balzac was at heart a cockney. He loved the life of the streets—an incorrigible busybody, he was perfectly happy regulating the traffic, driving away the shabby people who came to the area steps for scraps or bottles; making love to the next door cat, who spat at him in return; barking 'Good-morning' to the blind man at the

corner, and keeping, as he believed, the whole street in order. No dog ever suffers from doubts of his own importance in the scheme of things, and Balzac knew that Blenheim Gardens could not get on without him. Well, let it try!

The next day, after Marica's preposterous sugges-

tion, Balzac was missing.

Marica, returning home to tea from lunching with the Aunts found Léontine in floods of tears on the front stairs. With streaming eyes she announced the tragedy that had befallen the household.

At eleven o'clock, she explained, she had taken Balzac with her to shop in Sloane Street, to buy some buttons for Mademoiselle at the "Maison Catt."

"Balzac ought to have liked that!" Marica murmured, but Léontine, disregarding the flippancy,

continued her tale of woe unheeding.

"Unhappily," she said, "Balzac to-day was en grand tenue." Only last night she had given him his weekly 'shampoo' of violet-scented julep. (Balzac hated it with all the fervour of a rat-loving nose.) This morning she had brushed and combed him carefully, his parting—the pink line that ran straight from the tip of his terrier's nose to the beginning of his poodle's tail—was perfectly executed. It was enfin in a condition of ravishing beauty that Balzac had started out for his morning's walk. "Il était trop beau, trop beau!" sobbed Léontine, "I might have known he would be taken from me!"

"Well, what happened?"

"Mademoiselle, as usual when entering the shop the Maison Catt—I said to him: 'Reste-là, Balzac!' Thus, Mademoiselle!" and Léontine executed an authoritative gesture, "and he agreed!"

"But how did he agree?"

"Oh, Mademoiselle knows the way that Balzac has of expressing himself. If Balzac had been unwilling to wait he would have walked away immediately."

"And as it was?"

"He gave a shake of the shoulders," said Léontine,

making a descriptive gesture, "and seated himself with a sigh upon the door-step. Exactly like a man when one takes him shopping!" she added, smiling through her tears.

"And then what happened?"

But at the question Leontine's eyes overflowed once more.

"Oh, Mademoiselle, when I came out of the Maison Catt, having bought the buttons, I look for Balzac. But Balzac, he is not there. Disparu! I whistle, I call 'Balzac! Balzac!' He comes not. I run about the street, I mount, I descend. Pas d'Balzac! 'Alf an hour I wait and I call, and then I come home. I say to myself, 'Balzac has return without me as he has the habit of doing if he have to wait too long.' But no! he is not here! Balzac is lost!"

The tears rolled unchecked on to the front of Léon-

tine's neat black gown.

Marica, looking at her, felt a lump rise in her own throat. What would the house be like without Balzac? If only for the sense of proprietorship he gave one in its possession, he would be missed. A house so fiercely guarded must be of some peculiar importance! But Balzac was more than a loyal retainer, he was as Léontine had said long ago, "Quelqu'un." His unaccountable aversions—as to Ermyntrude, the between girl who wooed him in vain with cutlet bones—his affection for Denman who spoke of him merely as "the dawg" and pushed him away with his foot; his love of music and unrequited devotion to the next door cat; and above all his passion for Léontine, set him apart from the usual run of dogs. If Balzac was indeed lost he could never be replaced.

"Perhaps he has been found and taken to a police

station?" Marica suggested tremulously.

Léontine shook her head. "Balzac would never permit himself to be approached by a common policeman. He has too much dignity. No, no, there is but one explanation—Balzac has been stolen. Il était trop beau, trop beau!" Léontine wailed again hopelessly.

"But, Léontine," said Marica trying tactfully to avoid hurting the poor woman's feelings, "though Balzac is beautiful as we know, it is rather the beauty of soul than—er—exactly of body. A matter, I should say, of personal magnetism. Commercially he is worth—well, shall we say 2 francs 50?"

"Pas plus!" Léontine agreed, her sense of humour coming to her rescue. "Balzac is doubtless of uncertain ancestry. But surely, Mademoiselle, it is the people of mixed race who are always the most gifted,

is it not so?"

"No doubt. Still, genius does not stamp itself upon the forehead. And therefore to the dog-stealer,

Balzac would probably offer no temptation."

She smiled as she remembered the gibe of a passing telegraph-boy as she walked once with Léontine leading Balzac on a lead down Bond Street: "'Ullo, miss, you've gone off with the blind man's dawg!" the wretched urchin had shouted at the indignant Léontine. Yet the description was extraordinarily apt. Balzac was exactly like a blind man's dog, and a very blind man's dog at that. It was unimaginable that anyone possessing the gift of sight should deliberately select Balzac from amongst all the dogs in the world for their chosen companion.

But to know him was to realize that Balzac was

unique.

"We must offer a reward!" Marica murmured. Yet could a reward of ten shillings or even ten pounds

represent Balzac's real worth?

Tea was laid as usual in Marica's little sitting-room and sitting down beside the fire she mechanically poured herself out a cup of the beverage which she had never found either to cheer or to inebriate. She longed, as she had often done before, for the nervous system which responds to the charm that a cup of tea exercises on most Englishwomen.

"Something was left out of me when I was made!" she sighed as she sipped the steaming liquid in un-

abated gloom.

As she did so her eyes fell on a small object peeping out from beneath the frill of the sofa cover. Balzac's latest purchase—an india-rubber doll in a ragged red woollen vest that lay where he had dropped it before starting on his fatal walk that morning. She remembered with a pang that she had scolded him about it, for Balzac, who had a passion for all things made of india-rubber-dolls or balls or squeaking animals—had recently developed a practice of going to the nearest toy-shop and carrying off whatever india-rubber object took his fancy—and the owner of the shop, knowing where he came from, sent in the account weekly. Lately the accounts had grown heavier—"to one india-rubber cockatoo 3/6" was followed only two days later by "to india-rubber rattle $\frac{2}{3}$." But the doll in the woollen vest and hat at $\frac{5}{9}$ had been the climax, and Denman had been sent round with an order to the shop to close Balzac's account.

The doll, with its tattered vest, over which Balzac had kept watch for days lest any member of the household should attempt to wrest it from him, lay mutely reproachful on the drawing-room floor. For nights too he had lain awake guarding it, only in the early dawn creeping downstairs to hide it in the coal-box whilst he snatched a brief spell of slumber. Everyone, he knew, must long madly to possess it! And now it lay unclaimed—a horrible pathos in its neglected

attitude !

The door opened and Denman came in and approached Marica with his usual air of mystery.

"There's a lady down below, mum, and she's brought back the dawg!"

"Balzac!"

Marica sprang out of her chair with a shout of joy. "Balzac has come back?"

"Yes, mum," Denman answered emotionally.

"The lady asked if she might come up and give him to you personally," he added slowly.

"Oh, of course, show her up!" cried Marica as she

sprang to the door and called up the staircase to Léontine.

"Léontine! Léontine! Balzac is here!"

A door overhead opened tumultuously and with the sound of a whirlwind Léontine flung herself down the stairs almost falling at the feet of a pretty woman in a fur coat who was being furiously towed by Balzac to the drawing-room door. Her red lips parted in a peal of laughter as the maid, dropping on her knees, clasped the woolly dog in a frenzied embrace.

"Ah, how good of you!" Marica cried coming forward and leading the way into the drawing-room.

The stranger, letting go of the string and leaving Balzac to be carried off and wept over by the happy Léontine, came in and sat down in the chair Marica offered her.

How lovely she was! Wavy red-brown hair framing a smooth low forehead; big green eyes so curiously elongated and thickly framed with lashes at the outer corners as to give the effect actresses produce by a tiny touch of charcoal, a little straight nose, a complexion of Malmaison pink and whiteness and the mouth of a happy baby all curves and freshness. Here was a woman who did not wear the wolf look of society! Marica with her passionate love for beauty, warmed towards her instantly.

"How kind of you to have brought back Balzac!"

"Is that his name? How perfect! It exactly suits him, doesn't it? He is so thoroughly a realist—one sees that immediately," she said melodiously.

"Oh, yes, Balzac hates everything artificial. Léontine once made him a cloth coat for cold weather, trimmed with beaver, but he went straight and flung himself into the Serpentine to spoil it."

"Of course he would do that! You see I speak as if I knew him quite intimately—well, I feel I do."

"And how did you make his acquaintance?"

"He came about two o'clock to-day to the new bridge club I belong to in Knightsbridge. I suppose he wanted to join it. Anyhow he walked in, sat down on the corner of my gown and absolutely refused to leave me."

Marica nodded understandingly. "Balzac is a

person of violent sympathies and antipathies."

"He is extraordinarily fascinating. He spent the whole afternoon with us and won everybody's heart. I couldn't bring him back before, by the way, as I was playing in a tournament. It is really dreadful to have to part with him now. I wish we could make him a member of the club!" she added with a sigh, "but of course if we admitted one dog-"

"Léontine says Balzac is not a dog!"

"What does she think he is?"

"A re-incarnation of someone, I believe."

The lady reflected a moment. "What about François Villon? He has a ruffiantly appearance and the eves of a poet. Perhaps Léontine is right. Well, I must be going.

"Oh, don't go yet!" Marica cried impulsively. "If you only knew how bored I was when you came!

Do go on talking!"

It was so refreshing to meet anyone who could talk nonsense so delightfully!

At Marica's exclamation the stranger's pretty

mouth broke into an enchanting infantile laugh.

"You really mustn't be bored!" she cried in a voice like a silver bell. "It's such dreadful waste of time!"

"Are you never bored?" "Never in London!"

Marica sighed. "And London seems to me so sad."

"Sad?" Again the bell-like voice rose in remonstrance. "But London's the most enchanting place in the world. Did you ever see so many attractive faces in the streets of any other city?"

"No, but I never saw such sad ones either. Tell me," she cried impulsively, leaning forward with her chin on her hands, "why does one see so many hungry-looking people in London? I don't mean physically hungry—many of them look quite prosperous—but women, with a starved look, with thin necks and dull eyes—one doesn't see them on the Continent!"

- "No, I've noticed that often too. What they want is mental stimulus. Life in England is so grey compared to what it is abroad. These women want to be taken out of their respectable rut and be amused—they want to take their meals in open-air Bohemian restaurants, to eat strange subtle dishes to the accompaniment of weird Tzigane music, to be made wild love to by—but I'm shocking you!" she ended with a little peal of laughter.
- "Not a bit—I'm frightfully interested. Morality by itself isn't enough to keep us going—we must have colour and romance in life. And English husbands aren't romantic—or English lovers either," she ended with a little sigh.
- "Englishmen want understanding," the lady said with a smile. "They're the shyest creatures in the world, you know. But if one understands them they soon become so tame they will eat out of one's hand."
 - "And how does one tame them?"
- "Principally by making them feel one has no designs on them whatever—I don't mean merely matrimonial designs but designs for making use of them in any way. The Englishman has a horror of being 'cornered'; he dreads the woman who will ask him to dine and nail him down to a date. He doesn't know what he may want to do when the date comes round—he may want to turn into a music-hall or merely go to bed. At any rate he wants to be free."

Ah! that was why men dreaded society and why when one did meet them in it they wore the trapped look! For the first time Marica found herself sym-

pathizing with them.

"Life is, of course, much more amusing lived impromptu!" she said with sudden conviction.

Oh! that red leather engagement book with its

"Lunch Grundisburghs," "Tea Morecambes"-

could anything be more uninspiring!
"I believe," she said reflectively, "men are much wiser than we are because they live quite simply, like children do, by the inspiration of the moment. Why don't we do it too?"

The lady smiled peacefully: "But I do!" she

said.

Then that was why she had not the wolf look! That was why she seemed serene and satisfied! Women, thought Marica, were not meant to fight, to snatch, but to wait for the good things of life to come to them, and when they did that they remained calm and sweet and beautiful as Nature intended.

"Do come and see me again," she said impulsively, when a few moments later the lady, gathering her furs

round her, got up to go.
"Would you really like me to? Then of course I will!" she answered lightly. "And, please, may I say 'Good-bye' to Balzac?"

Léontine, beaming at the further attention bestowed

on Balzac, was summoned from above.

"I am so glad he is appreciated," the lady murmured as she shook his woolly paw, and with another enchanting smile she vanished down the stairs.

"Ah, quelle dame charmante! Quelle charmante dame!'" cried Léontine, tears of joy in her eyes. "There is a lady who should come often to see Mademoiselle and égayer her. She will come again?" she added anxiously.

"I hope so, but-

"Eh bien, Mademoiselle?"

"Oh, Léontine, I quite forgot to ask her name!"

A few days later Marica developed influenza, and for a fortnight she lay in bed aching and feverish, whilst Léontine nursed her with all the fervour of which she was capable.

A French maid is either a ministering angel or a fiend in human form—God help the mistress to whom she does not take a fancy! Léontine would have seen Cynthia Brinton die—as the *tricoteuses* watched Marie Antoinette—with a shrug of the shoulders and a gamine grin, but she watched over Marica with an untiring solicitude and no thought for her own need of rest or amusement.

With convalescence came the problem of how to cheer the invalid. "Mademoiselle a besoin d'être

égayée!"

Léontine went and bought French books and papers at the "Librairie Anglo-française" close by, of the kind that she and the proprietor agreed to be suitable for a *jeune fille's* reading. But they proved strangely unexhilarating and Marica put them aside and asked for "Pepys' Diary" which never failed to cheer her.

The Aunts were kind and came often—Lady Plumpton brought bunches of chrysanthemums and "The Letters of Queen Victoria." Louisa sat by Marica's bed and read the Nineteenth Century aloud to her. Harriet was more cheering, but even her tastes were too intellectual to be highly exhilarating to a brain which influenza has robbed of all power of thought.

"Ce n'est pas ça!" Léontine remarked, and shook her head as Marica, closing her eyes wearily after one

of these visits, murmured:

"Oh, for anyone who would come and talk nonsense. I'm tired of intellect, Léontine—I want someone who would be just silly."

Léontine nodded understandingly and then a gleam came into her eyes. Would Mademoiselle allow her to go out for a walk this afternoon, she asked suddenly?

"Oh, certainly," said Marica, "as long as Sarah doesn't come near me—I couldn't bear that yet."

Léontine returned at 6 o'clock wreathed in smiles.

- "All is well, Mademoiselle!"
- " How?"

"The charming lady, the friend of Balzac, is coming to-morrow to see Mademoiselle!"

Marica sat bolt upright with excitement.

"Léontine! How splendid! I've been longing to see her again!"

Léontine's smile widened still further.

"That was precisely my idea. And that is why I waited this afternoon outside the bridge club in Knightsbridge until she came out. I loosed Balzac and in a moment he threw himself upon-her. C'était fait accompli! She enquired after Mademoiselle and I told her Mademoiselle was ill and had need of distraction. Immediately the lady proposed to come and see her—she will come to tea to-morrow."

"Léontine, you've managed splendidly. By the

way, did you discover her name?"

"Mademoiselle, she is called Mrs. Touraine."

The next afternoon Marica came down, for the first time, to her sitting room. Clothed in a delicious "restgown" designed for her by the sympathetic Madame Pervenche, she sank into an armchair by the fire and closed her eyes weakly.

"How does Mademoiselle feel now she is up?"

"Only rather like a 'sole à la Colbert,' with my spine removed and melted butter in its place. Oh, Léontine, by the way, are there hot cakes for Mrs. Touraine if she comes?"

"Mademoiselle has no need to agitate herself, all is arranged!" Léontine answered with an authoritative

gesture

Marica leant back with a sigh of contentment— Léontine had, she knew by experience, the organizing brain of a Kitchener. Nothing would be forgotten.

A few minutes later Mrs. Touraine was announced. She came in looking lovelier than ever—a brilliant vision of velvet folds and frilly laces and dark sable furs. Her face glowed with health and a heavenly smell of fresh roses clung around her.

"How nice of you to come!"

"I'd have come before if I'd known!" she said sitting down and depositing a huge white paper "cornet" on Marica's lap.

"Flowers? Oh, how delicious!" for with the

opening of the *cornet* a rush of fragrance from great pink carnations and Riviera violets filled the room.

"What a priceless maid you have!" Mrs. Touraine went on gaily, leaving Marica no time for thanks, "she simply ordered me to come and see you, so here I am!"

"It was Balzac's idea to begin with! He brought you first!"

"Oh, Balzac is of course unique!"

"We must have him down to tea. He will be

frightfully hurt if he doesn't see you."

And Balzac, having been summoned from beneath Léontine's bed, dashed into the room and huddled himself against his new friend's velvet gown with all the assurance of a long acquaintance.

"Cake, Balzac?" Mrs. Touraine enquired, holding

a small bit towards him.

But Balzac twitched the tip of his black nose contemptuously.

"Doesn't he like cake?"

"He adores it, but you haven't asked him to do a trick yet. You see, Léontine taught him to do tricks for bits of cake or biscuit and now it offends him horribly if he is not asked to perform. It's like inviting a musical person to dine and not suggesting they should sing when you know they've left their music in the hall. Balzac chante donc!"

And when Balzac, with eyes raised to heaven, had sung a few bars in a quavering falsetto, he eagerly

accepted the bit of cake held out to him.

The little tea party was a very festive one. Mrs. Touraine was not only charming to look at but delightfully funny. The bell-like voice rose and fell as she talked of her adventures in the East, of life in London, of new books and plays and all the things of which to hear about was water to Marica's thirsting soul. For the first time since she came to London she enjoyed a good laugh. Mrs. Touraine's sense of humour was subtle and acute; she saw the funny side of everyone, yet with never a spark of malice. She was obviously

too happy to feel anything but kindly to all the world. And besides all this she was that rarest of rarae aves a good talker who is also a good listener. She drew Marica out and to her own surprise the girl found herself telling all about her odd life abroad and her adventures on the Sheep Track since she came to London.

The lovely green eyes were alight with sympathy. "How perfectly deadly for you! We must do things together-you and I-when you're well again! You must enjoy yourself, you know!" the charming voice

cried eagerly.

Marica smiled. "Have you ever been told what your voice is like?" she could not refrain from asking. "Sarah Bernhardt's is a voix d'or but yours is a voix d'argent! It is so clear and fresh, like a silver fountain. Don't tell me you don't sing, for I know you do!"

"I don't mind a bit admitting it! Shall I come and sing to you one day?"

"Oh, do! I should love it!"

She never forgot the first time Mrs. Touraine sang It was not like any singing she had ever heard before in London. Sometimes at the Morecambes and the other houses she frequented, there had been "a little music"; women had stood up at the piano and given the assembled guests the benefit of a magnificent system of voice production, metallic shouts and laboriously practised trills, during the performance of which everyone looked deeply bored and then brightened up at the end as they broke into a chorus of delighted thanks.

But Mrs. Touraine's singing seemed to be the result of no system; it was as careless as a blackbird's, a silver stream that bubbled from her lips with an irresponsible gaiety that Marica had never heard since she listened to the Italian washer girls singing to themselves as they beat clothes on the banks of the Var. She brought no music with her; only sat down at the piano and sang what came into her head-little snatches from operas, whimsical airs of Grieg's, and sometimes a sad wail of negro melody with all its

plaintive Southern longing in her voice.

When she came away from the piano, Balzac would seize her by the edge of her gown and drag her back to the music-stool. And even Mr. Fayne, passing the door on his way to the library, smiled peacefully instead of echoing the wish of Schopenhauer that the human ear had been furnished with flaps to shut out unwelcome sounds.

CHAPTER II.

NINA Touraine's flat in Maybury Mansions was one of the modern developments which are the despair of house agents with long columns of commodious "family residences" unlet on their registers. Within its tiny compass it contained everything the heart of woman could desire, from the pretty drawing-room with its flowery chintzes, its friendly armchairs or accommodating "poufs" to the tiny white tiled bathroom that smelt like a rose garden, with delicious soap and scent and powders arranged on a glass shelf along the wall. Marica loved it immediately—it represented a scheme of living so exactly the opposite to Aunt Charlotte's or the Morecambes.

The first time she lunched there—one Sunday in December—she was initiated into the results of Nina's "taming" process. Two men made up the little party—Sir Harry Winkworth, middle-aged and cheery, with a round face reddened by wind and weather on the hunting field; and Major Kilmurry whose friendly eye proclaimed his nationality at a

glance.

They seemed delighted to meet Marica, and as luncheon proceeded she realised that never since she came to London, had she felt so at home, so able to talk and laugh naturally, without the numbing dread of saying the wrong thing or of not playing up to the part of the young girl on whom society has set its hall-mark. Here, for the first time, she could breathe freely—be herself at last.

The others too, she noticed, enjoyed the same glorious freedom from constraint. About these men there was none of the "trapped air" as about the

self-conscious guests at the Morecambes' or the Baileys.' They were here because they liked to be here, and under the influence of Nina Touraine's easygoing hospitality, they opened out like flowers to the sun. One could talk to them quite naturally, never feeling they regarded one like Mr. Courtney Vincent and his kind, as a jeune fille à marier to be approached with caution and left as soon as possible for the safer propinquity of married women. These pleasant, irresponsible creatures lived for the moment, harbourno arrière-pensées, taking it for granted one was here, as they were, to enjoy oneself and be amused. For the first time she felt herself to be an attractive woman, to be sought after—no longer a superfluous girl to be kind to on account of one's forlornness.

Everything that concerned her seemed to interest them. They were deeply sympathetic about her

influenza.

"I had it myself once," said Sir Harry, "and I felt so weak afterwards that I burst into tears if anyone contradicted me. I was afraid for a long while to go huntin'."

"Afraid of your fences, old man?" Major Kilmurry

enquired.

"No, afraid of sobbing if anyone spoke roughly to me goin' through a gate. It seemed a cruel world for a long time. I hope you've got past that stage?" he added kindly, turning again to Marica.

"I don't feel it at all cruel to-day!" she answered smiling, as she helped herself to one of the strange and subtle dishes which people who cannot afford expensive cooks seem peculiarly able to provide.

After that they talked of books, and Sir Harry spoke of a new novel showing up "the sins of society,"

which was creating a sensation in London.

"Is society really so sinful?" Marica asked wonderingly, and with a little shrug she added: "I've only found it so very dull!"

"Oh, English society is always either Puritanical or Bacchanalian!" Major Kilmurry remarked. "And

each tendency in turn gets the upper hand—Cromwell and the Stuarts, the Georges and Victoria, and so on. It's just the swing of the pendulum. The more Puritanical we are to-day, the more Bacchanalian we shall be to-morrow."

"And which are we now?"

"Both. It depends which set one's in. One doesn't find a juste milieu in either."

"Why bother about society?" Sir Harry asked simply, looking round the table with his round blue eyes. "What do you say, eh, Pat?" he added, focussing them finally on Major Kilmurry.

"Pat isn't as farouche as you, Winky!" said Nina Touraine with a light laugh.

Sir Harry's dogged determination never to be dragged into society was always a subject of chaff amongst his friends. He came up to London at intervals from his hunting-box in Leicestershire to his snug rooms in Cleveland Row, where he entertained his cronies, did the theatres, haunted "the Yard," went racing and looked in at his club, but nothing would induce him to go to any of the balls and parties to which he was perpetually invited, "When I'm not doin' anythin' I like to be able to go to sleep in the evenin', he would say confidentially to anyone who asked him to dine. And one well-known 'hostess,' who had insisted on his coming to a dinner party, in spite of his declared tendency, had reason to repent her importunity, for "Winky" went to sleep in the drawing-room and snored noisily all the evening.

But Pat Kilmurry was of quite a different type. The Irishman is not afflicted with the Englishman's dread of finding himself in a social *impasse*. He knows he will be perfectly well able to extricate himself, whilst the Englishman is painfully aware that he will not. The Englishman's first thought, in entering a stranger's house, is how he will be able to get out of it again if he wants to. The Irishman suffers no

such qualms, secure that his native wit will help him to a successful exit.

So Pat-everyone called him Pat-went gaily wherever the spirit moved him; always welcome on his arrival, always regretted after departure. He could make himself useful in a dozen different wavssing, play, act, dance, or, most useful of all accomplishments, flirt to order, in the most charming and convincing manner. There was never anyone so obliging as Pat in this respect. The dullest, but most necessary woman could be turned over to him, and he would talk to her all the evening as if she were the only woman in the world for him so that she departed in a charming temper, feeling she had really met a man who appreciated her at last, and ready to do anything that was required of her. Needless to say, Pat was in request everywhere. He never minded where he went as long as there was the smallest chance of 'divarshun.'

"Don't listen to Winky!" he urged, smiling across the table at Marica, "he doesn't know a bit how to enjoy life—one must take sporting chances, you know! London's the most delightful, the most interesting and the most romantic place in the world when you know your way about it!"

"Romantic? Is it really romantic?" Marica asked wonderingly.

"My dear Miss Fayne, London's simply bursting with romance if you know where to look for it!"

"But where?"

"Oh, everywhere. In underground railways, on the tops of 'buses, at street corners—if you want romance you must look for it in the middle classes. Bank-clerks, shopwalkers, chiropodists—they're the only believers in the true romance. It is they who keep the sentimental drama in existence—the upper and the working classes don't care a rap about it. When the Guardsman goes to the play he goes to the Gaiety; his valet goes to the cinematograph. Only the middle class man wants a plot with a strong love

interest running through it."

"Yes, I know," cried Mrs. Touraine. "Mademoiselle Sylvie, the girl who manicures me at Cécile's, is engaged to a hairdresser who adores her. He brings her roses on her birthday and waits for her in the rain outside the shop for hours!"

"Why should it only be given to hairdressers to wait for women in the rain?" asked Marica, trying to picture Mr. Balcombe or Mr. Courtney Vincent damping the soles of their neat patent leathers on the wet pavement, for the sake of any 'inamorata' however adorable.

"Still, the Guardsman's not a bad sort," said Sir Harry Winkworth, who having, in his extreme youth, spent a year in the Grenadiers, cherished a life-long affection for his comrades in arms.

"You should talk to Mademoiselle Sylvie about Guardsmen!" said Nina with a laugh, "she sees them sometimes at the houses of the women she goes to manicure and has a sturdy middle class contempt for them. 'Rotters' she calls them, not to be compared with 'Bert' who plays football in his spare time and belongs to the Upper Packham Browning society."

"Even the most fervent admirer of the Guardsman would admit that he is not romantic!" said Major

Kilmurry.

"The Daily Mail says he is!" laughed Nina, "it is always telling us of a new 'romance of stage and peerage' as journalese hath it!"

"Which is no romance at all!" remarked Major Kilmurry. "It has simply become a convention amongst a certain set of young men to marry into the chorus, just as it becomes a convention to smoke a certain brand of cigarettes, or order boots from Bool."

"Ah! isn't that the Sheep Track again?" cried Marica, "some leader of the flock set the fashion and each one follows thinking he is being daring and

romantic!"

"Yes," laughed Pat, "and it never even occurs to them to leave the track by falling in love with a serious actress—no tragédienne or even comédienne outside musical comedy can ever hope to marry into the peerage."

"Tragédiennes are of course out of the question," said Major Kilmurry. "The kind of men who marry

actresses never see them."

"I admit," Sir Harry said looking up with a laugh, "that I always avoid that kind of thing myself. When I go to the theatre I want to be amused."

"Of course you do, Winky!" said Nina. "The outdoor Englishman hates a play that is really

dramatic.''

"Simply because he hates a 'scene'!" laughed Marica. "Dramatic plays are all 'scenes'—loud voices, women in tears, recriminations, explanations—all the things he spends his life trying to avoid! Isn't that so?" she asked gaily.

Everybody joined in the laugh.

"By Jove, you're right, Miss Fayne!" Sir Harry agreed heartily. "That sort of thing does bore us!"

Yet though these men might confess to this mental standpoint, Marica felt there was no antagonism in their attitude, as in that of the young men she had met before in society, who disliked or distrusted a girl for not thinking as they did. These cheery easy-going people had nothing but the friendliest tolerance even for a woman suffering from the curse of intellect; provided that she was attractive to look at and listened sympathetically to what they had to say, she might indulge as much as she liked in such secret vices as reading Plato or attending problem plays. And had not Marica too, declared that she was sick of 'intellect'?

The Aunts' curiosity was soon aroused concerning Marica's new friend. Mrs. Touraine happened to be at Blenheim Gardens on several occasions when they called, and Lady Plumpton felt it at last her duty to make enquiries of Marica about her.

"And pray, Marica, who is this Mrs. Touraine?" she asked with a touch of severity in her usually placid voice, when the little woman had fluttered gaily out of the room.

"Who is she? Really I don't know exactly!"

Marica answered rather blankly.

"But how did you make her acquaintance?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, Balzac introduced us!"

"My dear child! Then you really know nothing about her!"

"Oh, Aunt Charlotte, people one knows all about can turn out to be so excessively unpleasant that I really don't see what is to be gained by it." Did knowing 'all about' Mr. Courtney Vincent or Mrs. Draycott make them any pleasanter? "Nina Touraine," she went on lightly, "is very pretty, very charming, very amusing, and she sings delightfully, so what does anything else matter?"

To her surprise, Mr. Fayne coming in at this moment, heartily agreed with her. He had met Mrs. Touraine several times lately and she had won his heart by her sympathetic interest in his Babylonian

relics.

"A charming little woman!" he said, "and so

pretty!"

"I am surprised to hear you say that, Edward!" Louisa, who was also present, remarked drily. "She struck me as precisely like an advertisement for scented soap!"

There was a substratum of truth in Louisa's stricture. Nina's beauty was perhaps somewhat of the Vinolia order-if only on account of its perfection. Nature seldom takes the pains of the poster painter with regard to detail, veiling as she does, classic features with murky skin tints or compensating for hair of coppery gold with a profile of snub-nosed insignificance. But in the case of Nina Touraine, her sluggish spirit appeared to have been roused to unwonted fervour, for Nina's lovely face, with its rounded Greuze-like contours, was as perfect in colour as in form. Yet her eyes were a departure from the scented soap ideal, with their cold, clear greenness like the Atlantic in a gale instead of the cobalt, dear to the heart of the advertisement artist.

Lady Plumpton was, however, not to be led away from the point at issue by mere æsthetic discussion, so disregarding what she considered Edward's frivolous interruption, she returned again to the charge.

"Mrs. Touraine is not a widow, I understand?"

"Oh, no, Aunt Charlotte—I feel sure she has a husband—somewhere—"

"Somewhere? Not at—at ——?" she paused

enquiringly.

"At Maybury Mansions? I don't know. I've never met him there."

"You must find out about this. Next time you go

there you must ask whether he is out."

"Wouldn't it seem rather odd if I suddenly wanted to know whether he was out, considering I've never seen him at all?"

"Has Mrs. Touraine never explained why he was

not at home?"

"Oh, no. But, Aunt Charlotte, is that very remarkable? One so seldom sees the husbands of women whose houses one goes to in London. Lord Morecambe was never at Eaton Square, and I only saw Lord Grundisburgh once at Grundisburgh House. Mrs. Draycott and Mrs. Darset were really widows, but one wouldn't have known if one hadn't been told!"

But Lady Plumpton, accustomed to a more domestic manner of life, looked uncomprehending. "Surely you must know who Mrs. Touraine's husband is?"

she persisted.

"Oh, I believe he is a Captain Touraine in some Indian regiment," Marica answered vaguely, and with this meagre information Aunt Charlotte had to be content.

One afternoon, however, a few days later, Marica, going in at tea-time, found her new friend entertaining a middle-aged man with a bald pink head and

shy blinking eyes, whom she introduced as "Captain Touraine." He seemed to be either acutely bored or extremely nervous, and after hastily emptying his tea cup, he rose to his feet and shaking hands with his hostess, hurried from the room.

Nina watched him depart with a smile, and then as she sat back in the corner of the sofa and lit a

cigarette, remarked abruptly:

'So now you've seen Teddy!" "Is he a brother-in-law of yours?"

"No, he's my husband."
"Oh—I see. But why does he shake hands when he leaves the room?"

Nina gave vent to a little shriek of mirth. suppose it must have seemed odd to you, but-Teddy doesn't live here, vou see!"

"Ah!"

Nina took several whiffs at her cigarette and then added thoughtfully: "I suppose I ought really to have explained to you about it."

"Why should you tell me anything if you don't want to?"

"But I think I do want to. It makes things simpler if you know all about it. And perhaps you think—as so many nice good women do think—that there must be something radically wrong about a woman who can't get on with her husband."

"I can't imagine how any man who wasn't an

ogre could help getting on with you."

How was it, she wondered, that Nina could tame other men so successfully and find her own husband intractable?

"Teddy isn't an ogre," Nina said. "I think I should like him better if he were. No, he's nothing so exhilarating. He's simply a jelly-fish, a cold and unresponsive mass of bloodless jelly. One can do anything with a man if one can make him jealous, but one couldn't make Teddy jealous. I tried everything—going out and leaving him alone, flirting with other men—that's so easy in India! Teddy simply

smiled. Imagine a man who sits all his spare time working out chess problems and doesn't look up when you come into the room! If any other man admired me Teddy never noticed. One man asked me to run away with him. I thought I'd tell Teddy just to try and rouse him. He only said: 'I suppose the fellow had been dining,' and went on playing chess.''

"I think I could have killed a man like that!"

"It does make one feel murderous. But you see the law doesn't recognize that sort of treatment as cruelty, so there's no redress. That's why when women want to be free they're obliged to invent that their husbands have dragged them round the room by the hair, or poured boiling lead on their heads from a window. It would have been no good doing that about Teddy—no one would have believed it. Even the dear, credulous old things in the Divorce Courts would have seen it was a put-up job. So, the only thing was to take the law into one's own hands and get free without the sanction of Sir Bargrave Deane."

"How did you do it?"

"Oh, I simply tried going away at first on long visits and as Teddy didn't seem to notice, I made them longer and longer, till at last he said quite quietly he thought he'd move into rooms in Jermyn Street where he would be nearer his club."

"That's where men score over us so horribly. They can be so happy at their clubs. Why can't we

find ours as satisfying?"

"Because only one woman in a hundred really enjoys the exclusive society of her own sex. That's why men and women never can be equal."

"Until more women are educated up to being interested in each other. It's only a matter of time.

But go on about yourself, Nina."

"Well, dear, I've told you everything. Teddy lives in Jermyn Street and I live here. We settled it quite peacefully."

"I see, but——"

"But what?"

"I can't help wondering why you ever married him ! '

"Nina rose incontrollably and took a deep breath. "Oh, my dear!" she cried, taking up a dramatic attitude on the hearthrug. "If you had lived as I did at Netherbourne with a grandmother, you'd understand!"

"I don't know anything about Netherbourne, except that Aunt Charlotte loves it, and so does Canon Burnleigh who was there before he came to London."

"Exactly. Netherbourne is the parson's paradise. Local divines there achieve all the success of popular actors in London; the shops are full of their photographs which the Netherbourne spinsters sleep with under their pillows. Can't you imagine how one would welcome anything, anything that didn't wear black cloth and have slippers worked for it? India," Nina went on, "seemed a land of promise, too glorious for words-palms and pagodas and tiger shooting and balls and polo matches"

"Yes, I know," Marica said dreamily, "scented dust and throbbing tomtoms—one can imagine it all."

She remembered so well that moment of wild

longing on the quay at Marseilles.

"Do you wonder that I went?" cried Nina. "After years of tea-parties and curates and old women and the stifling atmosphere of femininity. Marica," she broke off suddenly, "I couldn't live always with other women—I was made like that—most women are, though they don't all know it. They get nervous and hysterical and take tonics to buck themselves up, when all the time it's the magnetism of man's society they need. Why, even a man's hat hanging in the hall, stimulates a maidservant to dust more thoroughly!"

Marica nodded. Yes, that was the trouble with girls like the Morecambes—they needed the companionship of the fathers and brothers who hid themselves in their lairs or clubs. When the Creator saw that it was not good for Man to be alone he realized only the lesser half of the tragedy of sex.

"So you see," Nina continued, "that after the sole society of a grandmother and her contemporaries—I had no parents or any other near relations—Teddy came as an angel of deliverance. I don't pretend I was ever the least bit in love with him, still he was really quite nice in those days, and it seemed so simple to marry him and get away from all the old dull and boring things. It's so fatally easy to marry the first man who proposes, Marica!"

Marica nodded, "Yes, I know—ce n'est que le premier pas qui coute—after that it becomes quite easy."

She felt thankful that Sir Charles Frimley's had been her first proposal, there had been no difficulty about that, but if it had been anyone the least attractive, she might quite possibly have made him into a hero of romance!

"And of course if the man happens to be a soldier," Nina continued, "it's all the easier at nineteen to feel romantic about him—I suppose there's the eternal nursery-maid at the back of most of us then."

"Were you happy at first, Nina?"

"Oh, yes, Teddy didn't become really horrid till we'd been married quite a year. After that—"She paused with an expressive shrug of the shoulders.

"How awful for you, Nina!"

"Oh yes, but—" and a sudden gleam of devilry flashed in the green eyes, "life has its compensations all the same!"

"I wonder what compensations there could be if

one had married the wrong man."

To Marica it seemed the most hopeless fate imaginable.

But Nina with a light laugh stretched out her arms

as if to embrace the universe.

"Ah," she cried, "just the joy of being alive is enough for me! I don't even really regret having married Teddy!"

"Nina!"

"No," Nina said firmly. "I really don't. Of course I lived through wretched times with him, but thank Heaven they're all over now, and anything was better than stagnating as I did before. Oh, Marica, I couldn't have gone on as a spinster—I'd rather have married anybody. It's so unadventurous too, never to marry! Like going to Egypt and not seeing the Pyramids. I want to 'do' life thoroughly, as the Americans say!"

Marica nodded. "Yes, I understand that!" Adventure of any kind always appealed to her. "It

would be dull never to marry."

"And once in Heaven there's to be no marrying or giving in marriage. We get our only chance down here—so it's now or never!" Nina added lightly.

Marica watching her realized that Nina Touraine's life was still untouched by tragedy. There are two divisions into which the myriad types of women may be broadly divided—the woman to whom one man is everything and the woman to whom all men are something. Nina Touraine belonged to the latter and the wiser class; though the one man she had married had failed her, the world was full of other men to supply those petits soins which to women of her type

are more than undying devotion.

Marica, constructed on precisely the opposite principle, could not understand her, but Nina was too lovely to criticize. The same love of beauty, which all her life had made Marica want to cry with joy at the loveliness of a summer evening, or of a poem by Heine, which made her search London for just the perfect shade of colour she wanted for a gown or hanging, which made the smell of violets so unspeakable a rapture, and one little prelude of Chopin's a thing of purest ecstasy; this also made her wretched in a world where aspiration was not, amidst the deadly prose of the London world where her lot had been cast. And it was this that made her turn with such immense relief to Nina Touraine and the gay and charming side of life she represented.

CHAPTER III.

As the weeks went by, Marica found her way more and more often to the little flat in Maybury Mansions. It was the rendezvous of innumerable pleasant people, cheery men and pretty women who made Marica so at home in their midst that they seemed like old friends rather than new acquaintances, for here was none of the suspicion of a stranger which distinguished the circles she had before frequented. Anyone who could contribute to the general festivity was welcomed, as long as one was "cheery" nobody bothered whether one was one of the right Greens or troubled to enquire about one's parentage. For no one was a snob! Nobody was ever heard to remark: "And who was she?" before deciding to like a new-comer—it didn't matter who she was if one happened to like her already. Everybody lived for the moment, did as they felt inclined, without premeditation; nobody went to call on anybody else; nobody kept an engagement book or wrote formal notes, or took any thought for the morrow's happenings. And so the door-bell rang merrily and people of all kinds dropped in to chat or smoke, or play a game of cards as the mood took They were seldom invited beforehand and never pressed to come again.

It is only for perfect liberty such as this that the Englishman will leave his easy-going bachelor's life for the pleasure of women's society. One may entertain him as well as one can, but the best of dinners, the most sparkling of wine and conversation will not really please him as much as being allowed to do just as he feels inclined at the moment. He wants to be able to drop in when the spirit moves him to come, or to stay away when it urges him in the

opposite direction; to be able to light a cigar in the drawing-room, or to tell after-dinner stories before tea.

It is the woman who understands the art of putting them at their ease towards whom men will gravitate, and it was this, even more than her really exquisite singing, which constituted Nina Touraine's chief accomplishment. She knew at once by a sort of maternal instinct what a man wanted to do and arranged for him to do it. If he had a fancy for strumming music-hall airs on the piano he would find himself spirited miraculously on to the music-stool; if he was in the habit of imbibing a whisky and soda in the middle of the morning, his favourite beverage would appear as if by a conjuring trick at his elbow. And the women who strolled in spasmodically and helped themselves to cigarettes or marrons glacés from silver boxes on the tables, made themselves equally at home.

Marica liked them less than the men, they seemed to her at first as artificial as the men were natural. Their clothes were lovely, their hair beautifully done, their hands carefully manicured, and they carried small bags which contained repairs to be applied in spare moments. Left alone with one of them, Marica noticed that she was almost certain to rush to a glass, and opening the bag, powder her nose or apply "rosaline" to her lips with skilful touches. Yet "inside," the girl decided after a time, they were really quite nice and simple—far more human than

any women she had met before.

Mrs. Temperley—whom everyone called Maisie—was a pretty woman of about twenty-eight, with fair hair parted in the middle and big blue eyes like a Persian kitten's. She begged Marica in a yearning Lena Ashwell voice to come and see her in her little house in Sloane Street. "When I am quite alone—then we can have a quiet talk! One grows so weary of the whirl of life, doesn't one?"

Marica, who had not yet had nearly enough of the

whirl, could not echo the sentiment, but she went to see Maisie, who received her charmingly in her tiny blue and white drawing-room and sang her old English ballads to the spinet.

Maisie was really rather sweet, Marica thought, yet somehow she did not interest her as much as Nina or as Mrs. Sherwood—whom she met one day at May-

bury Mansions.

Leila Sherwood was quite lovely, like an Egyptian princess drawn by a Paris artist—black eyebrows over long laughing eyes the colour of a dark scarab, a little short nose with rather wide nostrils and thick black hair that waved over her ears. She was sweet to Marica, smiling at her with an air of youth and gaiety that was quite irresistible. What a dear! the girl thought, but when she said so to Nina, she found the remark met with only a half-hearted assent.

"I thought she was a friend of yours?" Marica

said in surprise.

"So she is, a great friend and an old friend, we were at school together."

"Yet you spoke as if you didn't like her."

"Did I? Then I gave you quite the wrong impression—I'm very fond of Leila Sherwood."

"But you don't want me to make friends with her?"

Marica persisted.

"No," said Nina slowly. "That's quite true. I don't think I do want you to make friends with her. Perhaps," she added with a light laugh, "I'm a little jealous of your liking her so much!" But somehow Marica knew that that was not the reason.

The days flew by now, no string of well-matched pearls but a chain of gay adventures devised on the spur of the moment and forthwith carried out.

The telephone that Mr. Fayne had reluctantly allowed Marica to have installed in her sitting-room

rang continually:

"What are you doing to-night? Come with us to the play—Winky's sent us tickets." "We want you to join a party for the Midnight Club to-morrow

night-do come!"

Marica loved the Midnight Club, to which one repaired for a little supper about midnight and danced afterwards to the strains of an inspiriting Viennese band. It was her first experience of real dancing in London, and as different as possible from the dreary entertainment at Lady Morecambe's. Here was no pen of waiting girls, here were no "trapped" men or toiling mothers; one danced, as a matter of course, with the men of one's party who having themselves invited one to be there, did not leave one standing out a moment. And instead of the small crowded drawing-room floor, with hardly room to turn round, was a huge expanse of perfect parquet over which one glided with only about a dozen couples against which to avoid colliding.

And besides dancing there were hundreds of ways of being amused which the inventive faculties of these people helped to devise. When they had exhausted the meagre resources of the West End theatres-for there are never more than three or four plays one can sit through without yawning-they hailed taxi-cabs and were whirled away to suburban music-halls or Surreyside melodramas. When auction bridge and cooncan palled they played petits chevaux or absurd gambling games of Pat's invention, such as a row of dying boars each blown out to its full capacity and bets made on the probable survivor. On winter afternoons they rinked or skated, and when summer came they spent long days punting on the river, or playing golf, or motoring, as the mood of the moment prompted them. There was never even time to get tired of each other for new members were always being added to the circle. Pat would produce a friend from Ireland "spoiling" for a bit of "divarshun," who would entertain them royally for a week and then return to his native bog-land to recoup his resources. Young men Nina had known in India or China would flash upon the scene and as suddenly vanish againregretted for a day or two and then forgotten.

The thing that puzzled Marica most was the fact that nearly all the circle spoke of themselves as being "broke," yet this never seemed to interfere with their enjoyment. Maisie Temperley would remark sighingly that her husband—a dark taciturn man who seldom appeared on the scene—had threatened to sell up the house in Sloane Street and take her to live in retirement at Eastbourne, and the next day appeared in a new set of sables that would have paid at least quarter of the rent. These people never wore cheap clothes, and though they would sometimes go gaily to the pit of a theatre, they never appeared to practise any of the sordid economies which rob life of its spontaneity.

How did they manage it? the girl asked herself, as many another spectator of the game of life as played in modern London, has asked themselves. Half the gay world of London asks itself continually how the other half lives, for everyone knows people who without an income manage to do so much that they themselves with comfortable dividends can never achieve.

When one day Marica asked Nina incontrollably: "But, Nina, how does Maisie Temperley manage?" Nina shrugged her shoulders and answered:

"Oh, my dear, how can I tell? One can't go up to people, like the White Knight did to the old man sitting on the gate, and say: 'Come tell me how you live!' the while one thumps them on the head."

"Yes, the White Knight was determined to find out, wasn't he? And I suppose if one did adopt his methods the answers one would get would be about as illuminating as the old man's. Does Maisie search for haddocks' eyes or set limed twigs for crabs? And if not, how can she afford to get her gowns at Requin's?"

"I don't suppose she has to pay much for them. Requin's only too glad to have her at any price. Lots of the big dressmakers and lots of women in society do the same—the women who advertise frocks best

can't pay for them. That's why the rest of the world has to pay so much."

"Oh, I see, they're sort of amateur mannequins.

What an odd arrangement."

Mrs. Temperley seemed certainly to be on the best of terms with her creditors. At Christmas several sent her charming souvenirs, and a huge satin box of "bonbons" arrived with the Manager of the Carlville Restaurant's compliments. Insolvency was apparently no bar to consideration even in financial circles.

Of course there were "windfalls." From time to time Nina announced a successful coup she had made on the Stock Exchange, and Maisie Temperley owned a sort of fairy uncle who was always making her delightful presents. Then Pat backed a winner and gave a supper party to celebrate the event, or Winky came into an unexpected legacy. It was a reckless hand-to-mouth way of living that one must be a born gambler to enjoy. Marica thought it very amusing—these people got much more fun out of their money when they had it, than people like the aunts did out of their solid incomes.

Declining all overtures from the Sheep Track she threw herself into the new life with all the zest of pent-up youth. This was living—taking life as it came, with no thought for the morrow. It was only when one got off the Sheep Track one began to live!

Adeline Green had made the same discovery. Her letters from Assam were more and more joyful.

"Oh, Marica," she wrote, "living this heavenly life out here I can't imagine how I ever lived through all those deadly parties I used to think I was enjoying. Isn't it glorious how happy one can be when one stops working at amusement?"

Marica smiled. Was Adeline also among the philosophers? Adeline, who had sat reciting the social catechism over the teacups, had now hit on the solution of one of life's most puzzling mysteries.

Now Marica understood why people who lived for society usually grew hard and hungry looking—it was because they were always toiling, always planning, scheming and contriving to secure something that they believed would bring them happiness and that in the end usually proved disappointing, were always doing things in the hope that it would lead to something else, always cultivating people for their possible

utility.

Aunt Louisa's strictures on the paradox of hedonism-the unsatisfying nature of pleasure-did not meet the case at all, for one had only to look round in the world to see that many pleasure-loving people were perfectly happy. Lady Sophie Brinton had radiated happiness. Cynthia overflowed with joie de vivre! Nina Touraine's lovely face had nothing hungry in its rounded contours. Pat Kilmurry enjoyed every minute of his life. They were all pleasure-lovers, all destined, according to the moralists, to bitterness and disillusionment. Yet they went about the world smiling and at peace. Why? Simply because they did not struggle for the good things of life but waited peacefully until they came to them. It is not the pursuit of pleasure but the failing to secure it that gives the wolf-look and that is why the fundamental truth of hedonism is perhaps not a paradox at all!

By degrees Nina's friends began to gravitate to Blenheim Gardens. Sunday afternoon was quite a festive time now, and there were midnight hours when a party returning from the play padded noiselessly into the house so as not to awake Mr. Fayne—who went to bed regularly at 10 o'clock—and ransacked the larder for a fragmentary supper, whilst Pat, with the soft pedal down, sang "the ould bog-hole" in a whisper.

So far it was impossible to ask anybody in to a regular meal. Mr. Fayne's cook—chosen for him on account of her unimpeachable respectability by Aunt

Charlotte—was of the British variety which excels in extracting all the natural flavour from the ingredients of a dish. Anything more entirely devoid of any taste whatever than Mumford's omelettes could not be imagined, though her boiled chickens stranded in seas of bill-stickers' paste ran them very close.

"Papa," Marica said one evening at dinner, would you mind telling me if Mumford's cooking

is the kind you really enjoy?"

Mr. Fayne looked startled. "I do not think I ever gave the matter any consideration. What is it, my

love, to which you particularly object?"

Marica groaned. "Oh everything! But particularly mince! Mince with poached eggs and limp triangles of toast—I wonder who invented such an unpleasant combination. We live on mince, Papa, like the people in the Nonsense Rhyme!"

Mr. Fayne smiled whimsically. "You agree with Seneca. He did not like mince either. 'The cook performs the office of the teeth, for the meat looks as if it were chewed beforehand," he quoted dreamily.

"Seneca must have been blessed with a former incarnation of Mumford! But I thought it was Jorrocks who said that"—Pat Kilmurry had lately insisted on initiating Marica into the mysteries of sporting literature—"I prefer to do my own chewing."

"A flagrant plagiarism, my love! But to return to our minced mutton—if you think Mumford is incompetent, engage another cook," and he wandered

from the room.

With a light heart Marica sent an advertisement to the *Morning Post*, but the applicants, who arrived in answer to it the following morning, filled her with

dismay.

"They were perfectly terrifying, Léontine," she told the maid afterwards, when her hair was being brushed for the night. "They all seemed so resentful, except the last one, who looked a kind old thing, but she was seeing visions over her shoulder all the

time I was talking to her. It made me quite nervous."

"If Mademoiselle is so en peine for a cook," said Léontine, "would she allow me to make a suggestion?"

"Make any suggestion you like!" Marica said with a sigh.

"Eh bien, Mademoiselle, it is this. There is a young chef at the Restaurant Dieudonné, who adores me. Continually he writes to tell me that he is dying of love for me, to entreat me to marry him."

"And you think he would come here to see more of

you?"

"Not to see more of me, Mademoiselle!" Léontine answered with a laugh. "But if I were to marry him, Adolphe would certainly be willing to accept the situation."

"Léontine," cried Marica, "you would really

marry him in order to provide me with a cook?"
"But certainly, Mademoiselle, that would be a small service to render in return for Mademoiselle's kindness to me!"

"Are you sure you like him enough, Léontine?"

"Mais, Mademoiselle, il n'est pas mal du tout. Il est même trés bien, c'est un beau noir, tout à fait joli garçon. And he sings divinely."

"He sounds too splendid. Do you really think he

will agree?"

"Mademoiselle, Adolphe adores me to such a point that he will agree to anything I suggest if only I will accept his burning devotion. He becomes thin and languishing from the ardour of his passion."

"Well, restore him immediately to health by

propounding your scheme."
"Mille remerciements, Mademoiselle, all will arrange itself. Mademoiselle can leave it to me."

Léontine was as good as her word. One fine morning a fortnight later, she asked for a day's holiday for the wedding.

"Only a day, Léontine? Wouldn't you like at

least a week-end?"

"Oh, Mademoiselle, where should we spend a week-end? Nous nous embêterions joliment. Nulle part nous ne serions aussi bien que chez Mademoiselle. After the ceremony we will make the tour of the White City and return in time for Adolphe to cook the dîner du soir."

Accordingly the next morning, Léontine wreathed in smiles beneath a really charming "Casino hat," departed for church, and returned in the evening armin-arm with the *beau noir* who proved to be indeed a culinary genius of the first order.

And that was the beginning of convivial times at

the little house in Blenheim Gardens.

CHAPTER IV.

From this time onward Marica gave many festive little luncheon parties whilst Mr. Fayne was away at the Museum. The piquancy of Adolphe's dishes, combined with that of their hostess's personality, proved strangely stimulating to the guests. With a curious old-world charm of manner, she combined a sparkling vitality and bubbling sense of humour that acted like an electric battery on their often jaded nervous systems, and they vied with each other in satisfying her thirst for adventure.

Peter Trent, who would never be persuaded to join her parties, still came sometimes when she was alone.

"Ah!" he said one day, smiling at the transformation in Marica, "vous remplissez votre jeunesse!" For gaiety, the most potent tonic in the world, had strengthened her physique, the pale rose of her cheeks had brightened, her *Helleu* air of unreality had given way to a more radiant beauty. The misty grey gown she wore was the result of a moment of frenzied inspiration on the part of her dressmaker, Madame Pervenche, emphasizing the blue light in the greyness of her eyes and the delicate tintings of her skin. The collar was cut just low enough to show the slender neck, rounder than it had been in the old days, and always with the row of perfect pearls encircling it.

"Are you happy?" he asked her suddenly.

"Yes, I suppose so," she answered slowly. "Anyhow I enjoy life—every minute of it. Or, at least," she corrected herself, "nearly every minute."

But there were moments in the new life that jarred—

moments when she would shake herself impatiently and curse the "System." What was the good, she asked herself, of bringing up a girl to contemplate "beauty," when the whole science of savoir-vivre consisted in learning to take life as it came and not be squeamish?

When one evening after supper at Pat Kilmurry's rooms, Sir Harry Winkworth became unwontedly boisterous, Nina had merely shrugged her shoulders and remarked afterwards: "Of course, Winky can't

stand so much champagne!"

"Nina! You don't mean he was drunk?" Marica

asked in disgust.

"No, darling, of course not!" Nina said with a light laugh. "Only a little cheerful. Winky is rather given that way—you've noticed his tendency

to the ready tear!"

Yes, of course, she had often noticed and wondered. The crudest touch of pathos was enough to make Winky weep—a property baby carried on to the stage and alleged to have been just discovered on the doorstep would send the tears frankly coursing down his ruddy cheeks. Marica had rather loved him for his sensitiveness, but Nina's explanation was a painful disillusionment. Henceforth, she felt, she would never like Winky again—and then she snubbed herself for being a prig. After all, as Nina had said, Winky was never "drunk," and though to exceed even by a little in what one drank was revolting, to over-eat was even more so. She thought of Sir Charles Frimley and the seed cake, and decided that though the latter vice might be more respectable, it was even more unattractive.

She envied Nina her want of fastidiousness that made her able to accept the facts of life so peacefully. Nina was so uncritical—nothing jarred on her and nothing bored her. She could enter into any form of revelry—even that of the subalterns she had known in India, and who, when home on leave, mustered round her at Maybury Mansions, and whose sole form

of wit consisted in the ceaseless repetition of some catch-word which convulsed them each time with its humour. And Nina, who was really witty herself, could join heartily in their mirth! Marica, numbed by her inability to feel amused, watched her with envious admiration. It was so clever of Nina to be able to adapt herself to so many different kinds of people.

Mrs. Sherwood, the lovely woman with the Egyptian features, made only rare and meteoric appearances in the circle. Marica wished she would come oftener, but when she said so to Nina one day, Nina responded vaguely that Leila Sherwood's time was a good deal

taken up.

"What with?"

"Oh, Leila reads a lot and she plays too—she's very musical, you know. And then she's always travelling. She comes to see me when she's in London because we've been friends ever since we were at school together. But often for weeks together I never hear of her."

One afternoon at tea with Nina, Mrs. Sherwood flashed in upon them in her sudden unexpected way, and began to talk of a lecture on Madame de Sevigné she had just been to hear. Marica warmed towards her still further. Later, when Mrs. Sherwood got up to go, she turned with a sudden shy impulsiveness to Marica and invited the girl to come and see her in Queen Street.

"Of course I will!" Marica answered eagerly, but glancing at Nina she fancied that she detected a flash of annoyance in the green eyes. Why was Nina so strange about her friend? But the arrival of two of her faithful subalterns made any discussion of the subject impossible.

The next Sunday Nina was away with friends in the country, and Marica finding herself for once alone,

suddenly decided to carry out her promise.

She was glad, on reaching it, to find that Mrs.

Sherwood's little house was quite the gayest in the street, with its green door and bright brass knocker and window boxes full of lovely mauve hydrangeas. It was just the sort of house she had looked at longingly from Aunt Charlotte's carriage and at which they had never stopped to leave cards!

She followed the butler upstairs over a green mossy carpet into which her feet sank noiselessly, to a pretty drawing-room with a shining parquet floor and delicious blue Persian rugs. Her eyes, always eager for beauty, took in at a glance the exquisitely painted satinwood, the little tables covered with books and bibelots, and above all the flowers. Ah, they were heavenly, these clumps of tall white lilies and tiny climbing rose-trees, and the bowls of pink and mauve sweet peas that filled the air with fragrance!

Mrs. Sherwood, in a gown of dim purple that swathed her closely, uncoiled herself with a sort of boneless grace from the corner of a low sofa and came towards Marica. She was like a lovely jewel in a perfect setting, the girl thought with all the passionate love of harmony which is at once the blessing and the curse of the artistic temperament, as she sat down beside her hostess and bowed to the four men gathered round the tea-table and whom Mrs. Sherwood introduced to her. She looked at them with interest. The Duke of Brentwood-ah! he was one of the elusive people she had heard mentioned as impossible to secure for any social purpose; Captain Harding bore a curious resemblance to the photograph of Captain Morecambe, and the Vicomte d'Armanville was just the sort of interesting diplomat she had expected to meet but never had encountered at Grundisburgh House. But the most attractive of all was Lord Charles Thane, a tall man of about fifty with grey hair brushed away from his temples and the aristocratic features which are popularly supposed to be the result of "noble ancestry," but are more often usually Nature's compensation to the socially obscure. His black eyes with their look of alert intelligence

were curiously un-English, thought Marica, as she

smiled in answer to his courtly bow.

They were all charming to the girl, drawing her into the conversation with a tactful courtesy which set her at her ease immediately, just as the people at Maybury Mansions had done the first time she lunched there. At Nina's she had concluded that the men she met were of a different world to those that were to be met on the Sheep Track, and to this she attributed their simpler manners. But these men were not like Pat Kilmurry or Sir Harry Winkworth and their kind-easy-going Bohemians who could not be bothered with conventions—for an unerring instinct told her they were of Lady Grundisburgh's own world, men she might have encountered any day on the Sheep Track, but who, finding themselves in a congenial milieu, were able to throw off the gêne which distinguished their kind in society. Here, she reflected, was man in his natural state, no longer constrained by a hampering captivity, and under these conditions he was as different from the Mr. Courtney Vincents of society, as the animals she had seen disporting themselves in their native wilds on the cinematograph at the Holborn Empire were different to the resentful denizens of Regent's Park. Here was no reciting of the social catechism; they talked of all kinds of things-of books, of music, of travelnow in English, then for the sake of the Vicomte in French, which Mrs. Sherwood and Lord Charles Thane spoke quite easily. It was all as unlike that dreariest of functions—a London tea-party—as possible, and Marica glowed at the sensation which the finding of oneself suddenly amongst affinities, brings to the dreamer. For it was conversation like this she had dreamt of long ago at the Château, and people like these she had dreamt of meeting ever since she came to London. The freedom with which they discussed the pagan morality of a new opera interested her so much that it did not occur to her to feel shocked at the plainness of their language.

but when Captain Harding, who had taken no part hitherto in the conversation, embarked on startling details of a divorce case which was just now engaging the attention of the public and about which she knew nothing, her attention began to wander. She found herself looking round the room at the collection of china and miniatures which filled several old French cabinets.

Lord Charles Thane, noticing her abstraction,

came and sat down beside her.

"I see you are looking at Mrs. Sherwood's miniatures!" he said with a smile, following the direction of her eyes.

"Yes. Aren't there some lovely old French ones

over there?"

"Some of them are wonderful. Mrs. Sherwood has a 'flair' for finding treasures in all sorts of unexpected places. Would you like to look at them? I'm going to show Miss Fayne your collection," he added, turning to their hostess as he rose and led Marica across the room.

"You know Mrs. Sherwood very well?" Marica

said, smiling at the sans-gêne of his manner.

"Very well. And you?"

"No—only very little, but I think her charming. She is not like anyone I have met before in London."

There was something enigmatic in his smile as he

answered:

"Perhaps you are right. But then Mrs. Sherwood is only half English. What do you think of this miniature?" he added, handing her a tiny oval portrait set in pearls.

"Madame de Montespan?" she asked with interest.

"Yes—I see you are quite au fait of these ladies."
"I feel I know them quite well," she answered,
"I've read so much about them."

"And they interest you?"

"Ah! of course! Wasn't it then that civilisation reached its climax? We've gone back so far since!" she said with a sigh.

- "In morals?" he asked with raised eyebrows.
- "I wasn't thinking about morals," she said airily, "I was thinking about brains." And then suddenly carried away by her subject she went on eagerly: "They were so alive, those people, life was a perpetual feast to them, they wouldn't miss a particle of its flavour. They wanted to do everything, feel everything, know about everything! They danced and flirted and gambled with just the same zest that they put into politics or philosophy; they read Voltaire and science and metaphysics in the day, and frivolled gloriously at night. And because they'd known so well how to live they knew how to die toofor they made an art of everything. But here—"she paused with a little shrug of the shoulders.
- "You think we don't know how to live—in London?"
- "It seems to me," she said slowly, "that in London people are either serious or frivolous—until to-day"—she smiled up at him gaily—"I never met people who were both. And philosophy is a thing of the past."
- "Ah!" he said with a shrug. "Philosophy demands leisure. We live too quickly nowadays to think out anything au fond. In those days social life didn't begin till the afternoon—people had all day in which to work up their evening brilliance. Now, a woman's life begins with her morning tea—with half-a-dozen posts a day and a telephone bell always ringing, how can anybody find time to think? Even cabmen are no longer what they used to be. The old hansom cabby was one of the brightest wits of London; he had so much time, sitting on his box, to think things over. The modern taxi-cab driver has no nervous energy left him for repartee."
- "So he only succeeds in being rude?" She rose to her feet with a laugh. "Well, I must be going!"

Mrs. Sherwood, as she said Good-bye, begged her with an enchanting smile to come again.

"And you will come and see me too, in Blenheim Gardens?" Marica smiled back.

Lord Charles, following her out on the landing where he held her hand at parting just an instant longer than custom demands, asked whether the invitation might not be extended to him as well.

"Oh, certainly!" the girl said gaily. And the very next afternoon he came.

Marica, for once, was alone. Nina Touraine not having returned from the country there was nowhere to repair to for diversion on an off-day, and the girl drank her tea in the state of injured depression, which an afternoon in the height of the season with no engagement is apt to bring about in the mind of a gregarious woman. Under the cloying influences of boiling tea and hot buttered toast, she sat brooding gently on her forlornness, when Lord Charles Thane was announced. He stayed nearly an hour, talking of all kinds of things, of life in Paris, the new play at the Varietés, then of Italy and old Venice. His mother, he said, was half Venetian, and Marica understood the strange un-English look in his eyes which had puzzled her when he was first introduced to her. He spoke Italian perfectly, and finding that Marica was equally at home in it he went on talking in the mixture of tongues to which her cosmopolitan upbringing had accustomed her. He was surprised to find she had never been to Venice.

"Papa would never go there," she explained. "We went everywhere in Italy except to Venice."

"Because of the climate?"

"No, because of the music. Papa heard that people sang at night on the Canal and he was afraid they would disturb him."

"And do you dislike music too? Don't you go to

the opera?"

"I love music and I go to the opera sometimes-

to the gallery."

She did not feel it necessary to explain that the funds of Nina's circle never admitted of stalls.

Lord Charles leant forward eagerly. "Will you come with me one evening—to a box?"

"Oh, how I should love it!"

And then she looked at him and hesitated.

Since she had left the Sheep Track conventions had meant so little to her because they meant so little to the people she was with. But Lord Charles, she realised, belonged to a more conventional world. Would he think it odd of her if she accepted?

He was quick to read the hesitation in her eyes and

to guess its cause.

"Don't say that I must find a chaperon!" he begged, with a smile of amusement. "Surely I might count as a sort of uncle? As a matter of fact," he went on hurriedly, "I believe we are really cousins. I've found out since yesterday that I have some cousins of your name who live at Brighton."

She shook her head blandly. "Quite possibly—I know nothing about my relations. And besides I

have very few."

"Then mayn't I supply the deficiency and be an

uncle to you?"

She agreed laughingly, and he insisted at parting on her promising to go with him to the opera the

following Thursday night.

At the appointed hour he called for her in an electric brougham. Mr. Fayne was out dining with a friend—a Syriologist from Poland—at the Saville Club, and only Léontine, her grim face lit by a gleam of sympathetic pleasure at Marica's share in *la vie rieuse* was at the door to throw her cloak over her shoulders with a *gamine* smile of farewell.

"Is that your maid?" Lord Charles asked as the

brougham glided forward through the streets.

"Yes, that's Léontine."

"She looks a devil."

"Oh, she's a Frenchwoman!" Marica answered with a shrug, "and nearly every Frenchwoman has a devil, hasn't she? That's why they trim hats and do hair with such fiendish cunning."

Lord Charles glanced at Marica's burnished head. "You think she works off her devilment that way? But is it only Léontine's cunning?" he

paused expressively.

Marica laughed gaily. She knew that he admired her and somehow the admiration of this charming, courtly, old man—as he appeared to her—was curiously pleasant. Other men had admired her, but then they might have admired anybody! The average Englishman, she realised, is not fastidious, but Lord Charles was not entirely English and she felt instinctively that he was fastidious.

As she turned to look at him, noticing appreciatively his clean-cut profile, his well-brushed silvery hair, and the air of race that distinguished him, she reflected that here was old age under its most charm-

ing aspect!

At the opera, in the little upper box to which he led her, he was more than ever delightful, explaining all the obscure passages and telling her stories about the singers. But when he leant towards her she noticed that the look in his eyes grew more interested and more un-English as the hours went by.

"Tell me," he said with sudden eagerness just as the curtain was going down on the second Act, "will you come on to supper with me at the Carlville?"

For a moment she did not reply. She longed to consent but could one? Could one? And as she hesitated, looking vaguely round the tiers of boxes which suddenly flashed into sight at the fall of the curtain, a familiar vision caught her wandering gaze.

"Oh!" she cried, impulsively, putting her hand on Lord Charles's coat sleeve, "I've just recognised someone who would be horrified if I agreed to your

suggestion!"

"Who?" he asked carelessly.

"An old friend of ours and her daughter in that box down there!" she said, nodding in the direction of the Grand Tier where Lady Grundisburgh and Anne were sitting. "Not the imposing lady in sapphire blue?" he asked in an amused tone, putting up his opera-glasses.

"Oh, no, Lady Grundisburgh is in black, two boxes

away, and Anne-"

Suddenly Lord Charles put down his glasses and turned to his companion with a face of startled horror.

"Do you mean to say," he asked in a voice from which all the gaiety had departed, "that Lady

Grundisburgh is a friend of yours?"

"An old friend of Papa's—he knew her when she was quite a girl, before he married Mamma. Mamma," she said sadly, "was drowned a year after—"

"Drowned?"

A light of dawning recollection broke over his face. "But you don't mean—that—that your father was

Edward Fayne?"

"Yes, why not? Did you ever know him? Ah, of course," she added banteringly, "since you are my Uncle, of course you know all about him!"

But the little pleasantry met with no response from Lord Charles, who sat with puckered brow murmuring incontrollably, "Marica Fayne—Edward Fayne's

daughter! God bless my soul!"

He seemed so disturbed by the discovery that the girl wished fervently she had not embarked on her genealogy. Why had it upset him so? Had he been perhaps an old lover of her Mother's? That was just the sort of thing that happened in novels—an old man met a young girl he admired and then discovered she was the daughter of his old love—yes, that must be it! How nice and romantic!

"Did you know Mamma?" she asked gently.

But he answered so abruptly: "Only slightly!" that Marica concluded that she had been wrong in her surmise. What was the matter then? All Lord Charles' gaiety had departed, and for the rest of the opera he was prosy and preoccupied.

When it was over he helped her on with her cloak and then said in the same constrained voice: "I

wonder whether you will think me very inhospitable if I suggest that I should drive you home now instead of going on to supper? I have quite an unendurable headache!"

"I'm so sorry," she said sympathetically. "Of course we won't think of supper. D'you know, I thought somehow there was something wrong," she added, as they made their way along the passage. He did not answer, or indeed say another word until they were once more in the electric brougham gliding through the streets. Then suddenly turning towards her, he said in the gentle tone he had used earlier in the evening:

"Tell me, little girl, how do you come to be going about like this in London?"

"Like what, Lord Charles?"

"Well, without your relations!"

"But I have so few relations—none to 'take me out' as it's called. The Aunts are quite kind, of course, but they don't go in for society, and Papa knows no one now—."

"Except Lady Grundisburgh! Surely as an old friend she might have introduced you to her set!"

"But she did introduce me to some of her set!" Marica said with a laugh, "Only I'm afraid I didn't find them very amusing."

And then she told him how she had felt about the Sheep Track and her determination to strike out a new

path of discovery for herself.

"And since then," she cried eagerly, "I've begun to live—life has become the glorious adventure I'd always dreamt it might be. Long ago, when I was quite a litle girl, I used to dream of coming to London, of being in the great world where one could meet all sorts of clever and delightful people, like those one reads of in descriptions of the 'salons'; brilliant women who knew their power and used it; men who thought and felt as well as acted; conversation in which both would strike sparks from each

other's intellects—the force of man, the fineness of woman, each brought into play. But on the Sheep Track," she went on with a little despairing gesture, "what was there? No conversation but the social catechism, no wit, no joy of living, and no place for any woman except as the giver of expensive parties. In this world of London, each woman has just got her market value—beyond that nothing. It's what she's worth to society, what she can give it in solid value that counts. Mrs. Malines, Mrs. Darset, Sadie B. Funk—those are the only women society has use for. And then——"she took a deep breath, "I met Nina Touraine—Mrs. Sherwood! And that day at Queen Street it was just what I had imagined, no longer reluctant men and struggling women, but woman in her right place, sought after, pursued! Ah, I was so glad, so happy!"

Again that inscrutable expression came over Lord Charles's face, and he sat for a few moments looking out of the window without speaking. Then he turned

towards Marica again and said very gently:

"Dear little girl, it's quite true that many of the most charming people and the most interesting sides of life are to be met off what you call the "Sheep-Track." But remember that to leave the Sheep Track is to complicate life quite enormously, to encounter perplexities for which your curious upbringing can never have prepared you. Life on the Sheep Track may be boring and often strenuous, but it is not perplexing—even a black sheep can be quite happy if it pushes along in the wake of the bell-wethers. Society, you see, is a game with fixed rules, of which perhaps the most important is this: it doesn't matter what you do but who you do it with. Smash the decalogue to bits but don't break the social code: go where you like, do what you like, but with the right people. I don't think you and I will meet again for some time—I'm starting for the East in a few days, and before I go I want to ask you one thing. If you get the chance of going back to the Sheep Track with a nice, friendly bell-wether to push your way for you, will you take it?"

She shook her head with a smile that was half a sigh. "What would be the good of promising? I don't think I was made to fit any sheep track."

"Perhaps you were made to be a bell-wether!" he said. And just then the motor stopped at the door of

52 Blenheim Gardens.

"Good-night," she said, giving him her hand.

He bent his head and kissed it.

"Good-night and good-bye!" he murmured.

His eyes were full of tender regret as he watched her vanish through the doorway of the little house.

CHAPTER V.

THE mysterious episode of Lord Charles Thane piqued Marica's curiosity more than anything that had ever happened to her. What did it all mean? Why had he been so gay and friendly at first and afterwards so constrained, so gêné? Why did he invite her out to supper and then plead headachean affliction from which he was quite obviously not suffering? Had she said anything to offend him? Or was it a mere matter of magnetism—that strange force that sometimes repels as strongly as it has formerly attracted? But no, his manner at parting had been the reverse of antagonistic, and when the next morning, what appeared to be the entire contents of Marcel's flower-shop in Bond Street walked into the drawing-room with Lord Charles Thane's card attached, any lingering doubt she entertained as to his feelings was dispelled. She found herself wondering how old he was, and next day, discovering a dusty volume of Debrett beneath a pile of waste paper at the top of a bookcase in the library, it suddenly occurred to her to look him up in it. It gave not only the date of his birth-which showed him to be fiftytwo-but also that of his marriage and the births of his three children. He had a daughter, Veronica, just Marica's age! Why had he never mentioned them? Surely as they had become such good friends it would have been natural? In the manner of his farewell there had been a finality by which Marica felt instinctively the strange adventure was to have no sequel, and indeed from that day onward, not only Lord Charles, but Mrs. Sherwood vanished as completely out of her life as if they had never come into Nina, to whom, on her return to London, she recounted the whole episode in detail, smiled enigmatically as before, and offered no solution to the

mystery.

But life moved too quickly now to leave one time to ponder on any problems, and in a few days Marica had ceased to wonder and looked back on the incident with only momentary feelings of regret at the abrupt ending of an interlude in *la vie rieuse* which had seemed likely to prove interesting. For, except at rare intervals, the new life still held its charm for her and she felt no inclination to follow Lord Charles's advice and take any opportunity of returning to the Sheep Track. Her determination in this respect was a matter of deep regret to Lady Plumpton.

"From all accounts," she remarked one day to Harriet with a sigh, "Marica is becoming more and more Bohemian. Mrs. Burnleigh was telling me that she actually saw her the other evening in the pit of a theatre with the most extraordinary looking man to whom she was talking in quite a friendly way and

apparently enjoying herself thoroughly!"

Marica, when questioned about the episode, cheerfully admitted the accuracy of Mrs. Burnleigh's story.

"Oh, yes, Aunt Charlotte, we had a delightful evening! Everyone was feeling rather hard up, so we made up a party for the pit to see the new Socialist play at the Court."

"But who was the impossible person with you?"

"Do you mean the Russian anarchist with long hair? He wasn't with us, he only happened to be sitting next me."

"Then how did you come to be talking to him?"

"But that's just the joy of sitting in the pit or gallery, Aunt Charlotte—you can talk to anybody! And the anarchist began to make remarks to me about the play and became so interesting that we quite made friends." She did not add that the intervals of the play not allowing for a full exposition of his theories she had met him next day for tea in an A.B.C. shop, where he had held forth to her for an hour on the political situation in Russia.

But already Lady Plumpton was sufficiently scandalized and when, after the girl had gone away, Lady Grundisburgh appeared to pay the three sisters one of her infrequent visits, Charlotte could not refrain from telling her about Marica's latest escapade.

"It is odd you should happen to mention this," Lady Grundisburgh remarked, "for only yesterday I heard some very strange stories about Marica.

vou ever meet Charlie Thane, Charlotte?"

"Lord Charles Thane-the Duke of Medway's brother?" Charlotte asked in an embarrassed tone, for Lord Charles's lurid reputation and the story of his matrimonial complications as unfolded before Sir Francis Jeune in the early nineties had penetrated even to 301 Queen's Gate. Lady Grundisburgh smiled; she was woman of the world enough to be amused at Charlotte's shocked expression. One must be more careful what one said to Charlotte than to

any twentieth century débutante.
"Oh, of course," she said soothingly, "poor Charlie has always been rather wild, but I knew him very well as a boy, and there was certainly something nice about him. The old Duke-his grandfathermarried an Italian, you will remember, and that may account for his rather volage temperament. I had not seen him for years, but I hope from what I heard that he is becoming more rangé. Well, to my surprise, he walked in on me yesterday and in the course of conversation he mentioned Marica. Apparently he had met her somewhere—he did not say where—and seemed to have taken a great fancy to her. He said she reminded him of his own daughter, Veronica, and that she was quite the most charming girl he had come across for a long while."

"Oh, Marica might be very nice," Lady Plumpton admitted with a sigh, "if only she would be more like

other people!"

The more closely one resembled the rest of the human family the nearer one approached perfection in the eyes of Lady Plumpton.

"Charlie Thane seemed really quite distressed about Marica," Lady Grundisburgh continued. "Apparently she has taken to going about with all sorts of people, and she was at the house of some quite impossible woman!"

"That must be Mrs. Touraine!" Lady Plumpton

said with conviction.

"Possibly. He did not mention the name. But it was one," Lady Grundisburgh added ominously, "known at all the clubs."

The significance of this fact was of course lost upon Charlotte, who asked ingenuously: "But where did he meet her himself, Caroline?"

"That he did not tell me. In fact he particularly begged me not to mention him in the matter. gathered that it was mainly what he heard of Marica that had distressed him, and he was very anxious that I should use my influence with her. He really became rather absurd about it," Lady Grundisburgh went on with a cold smile, "he seemed to imply that I was in some way responsible for Marica! As I said to him: 'My dear man, I cannot do more for the girl than I have done already, and Anne has gone out of her way to be kind to her!' But he was quite unreasonable and wanted me to go and talk to Marica about it."

"Oh, Caroline, I wish you would!" Charlotte said earnestly. "Marica no doubt looks upon us as

old-fashioned, but she might listen to you!"

"It would be very magnanimous of me!" Lady Grundisburgh said after a moment's reflection. "For Anne has asked her to tea twice during the last few months and each time Marica has made the most

transparent excuse for not coming."

But the next day, Lady Grundisburgh's magnanimity having triumphed, she contrived to fit in a call at Blenheim Gardens, between a visit to a picture exhibition by an aspiring impressionist artist, who had implored her patronage, and a committee-meeting on the Causeries for charwomen.

"Well, my dear Marica!" she said, sweeping

majestically into the room, "it is a long while since we saw anything of you. Lately my time has been more than usually taken up—we were in the country for Whitsuntide, you know, and had the wives and daughters of the Canadian delegates to stay for a week-end." She sighed, with the pleasant conscious-

ness of accomplished duty.

"Really? How very kind!" Marica murmured, paying the required tribute to the great lady's philanthropy, and wondering what this sudden visit portended. Was she to be invited to keep the magnates of Montreal and Toronto amused? But Lady Grundisburgh did not leave her long in doubt; she was too busy a woman to waste time in leading up to any subject that she had at heart, and she lost no time in coming to the point.

"I am sorry to hear—from various sources—" she began in her smooth well-bred voice, "that you have taken to going about with undesirable acquaintances. As one of your father's oldest friends, I am sure you will understand that I am bound to remon-

strate with you."

"Would you mind telling me what you have heard

about my acquaintances?"

"My dear Marica, it will be much pleasanter for both of us to mention no names. I will only say that such rumours have reached me, particularly with regard to a certain lady, at whose house you have been seen and who, I gather, is a quite impossible person."

"Do you mean my friend, Mrs. Touraine?"

Marica asked, bewildered.

"As a matter of fact I believe that was the name of one of your friends of whom your Aunt Charlotte spoke to me. She, too, is very much distressed at the *milieu* into which you have drifted. Surely, dear child," she went on more gently, "you must realize the importance of knowing really *nice* people?"

Marica hesitated, then with sudden courage, she answered bluntly, "I am very sorry, Lady Grundisburgh, but I'm afraid I don't. People of all kinds

interest me so much that I don't worry whether they're what is called 'nice' or not, as long as they're human and alive. That's why," she went on, "I love sitting in the pit and going in a bus—one sees people there one would never meet in any other way."

"Oh, of course, if you take an interest in the working classes, that is very nice, very nice indeed, Marica!" Lady Grundisburgh said graciously, "but if I remember rightly, you showed no enthusiasm about the German maids I asked you to help me entertain!"

Marica looked at her with a smile; in a word Lady Grundisburgh had voiced the attitude of her world—themselves, that is to say, "the right people," and the working classes; the people in between did not exist for her.

"I'm afraid that isn't quite what I meant," Marica said helplessly. It would be impossible ever to make Lady Grundisburgh see things from her point of view. There is probably no one on earth quite so limited as a woman who has always occupied an important and assured social position. As Marica gazed at her guest's complacent handsome features, she reflected that to Lady Grundisburgh's mentality there would be something radically wrong about anyone who, even if born in the moon, did not know "the right people" in London. To picture existence in any other social circles was a gymnastic feat, which it would be impossible for her powerful brain to perform. That it was powerful, the girl was well aware, no one could cope better with the organisation of charitable schemes or the entertaining of ambassadors, but the agility of mind required for putting oneself in someone else's position—and that an equivocal one—was a different matter. So realising the uselessness of attempting to urge Lady Grundisburgh's mind to such unwonted antics, she said no more but waited for the great lady to go on.

Lady Grundisburgh, taking Marica's silence for

increasing meekness, now pursued her point in gentler tones

"It seems such a pity, dear child, that you should have dropped out of the pleasant set of people you went about in last year. Lady Morecambe, for example, always spoke most kindly of you, but when I last saw her she told me she had seen nothing of you for a long while. You did not even go to Augusta's wedding!"

Yes, that was quite true; it was only through the Morning Post Marica knew that Augusta Morecambe and Mr. Courtney Vincent had been married at St. Peter's, Eaton Square, to the strains of "Oh, Perfect Love." A smile flickered across her lips as she

answered hastily:

"No, that's quite true," and looking the great lady firmly in the eye she added, "I have given up society!"

"And pray, may I ask why?" Lady Grundisburgh

asked coldly.

"What does that sort of life lead to?" Marica said

with a little shrug of the shoulders.

Lady Grundisburgh smiled. If Marica had been attending Canon Burnleigh's sermons and was beginning to realise the "hollowness of society," there was no harm in that. Perhaps after all they had misjudged her. Lady Grundisburgh decided to be more human.

"In your case, my dear Marica," she said kindly, "I hope it would lead to your making a suitable marriage!"

Marica sat bolt upright and took a deep breath.

"If I went out for twenty seasons in society," she said emphatically, "I should never meet a man I

could marry!"

Lady Grundisburgh looked at her in alarm. Poor dear Edward had always been peculiar, but then he was a genius—everybody said so—and it was to be feared that Marica had inherited only his peculiarities, which in a girl were simply deplorable.

"What can you possibly mean?" she asked, meeting the flash in the girl's grey eyes with a stare of bewilderment.

"I mean," Marica said impulsively, forgetting her resolve to maintain a respectful silence, "that the men who go out in society—to tea-parties and dances—are a breed apart. It would be impossible to get up any feeling for any of them—you never meet a real man amongst them—except by accident!" she added, remembering Mr. Green and the one appearance of Peter Trent at Grundisburgh House.

"And what sort of men do you suppose you will meet by becoming declassée?" Lady Grundisburgh asked in freezing tones.

" Declassée?"

"Yes, by being seen at the houses of impossible people—by going about with men unchaperoned?"

Marica gave a little wriggle of impatience. "But what is the object of being chaperoned? Why can't we treat the Englishman as the safe and uninflammable being that he really is?"

"My dear Marica," Lady Grundisburgh said, as if she were reasoning with a lunatic, "it is not so much a matter of what men will do, but what people will think—of what men themselves will think—do you wish them to think lightly of you for making yourself cheap?"

Marica winced. The shaft had struck her most vulnerable point—her femininism. The attitude of man towards woman, wasn't that what mattered most in any social system? And did men really think lightly of one for disregarding the conventions? Possibly! But on the other hand did they necessarily respect one for regarding them? She thought of the rows of girls round Lady Morecambe's ballroom—were any women made more cheap than they? And Adeline, drooping on the edge of the bath—did men appreciate her because they never doubted her adherence to their code? Never doubted it because

they never remembered her existence! Was this oblivious form of appreciation worth giving up all the fun of life to win?

Again she took refuge in silence from the storm of

words that rose to her lips.

Lady Grundisburgh, mollified by her apparent

submission, smiled once more, benignly.

"And now, my dear Marica," she said goodhumouredly, "I hope you will think over what I have said, and be more careful in future. As to Mrs. Touraine---'

"Oh, I couldn't give up Nina!" Marica interrupted

quickly.

"But, my dear child, you really cannot go about with such a person. Mrs. Touraine is not in society at all, she does not live with her husband-"

Marica sprang to her feet and faced Lady Grundisburgh indignantly. "I don't care!" she cried, "Nina is my friend—"

"You must give her up!" Lady Grundisburgh said, rising majestically. "Listen!" she went on, her voice rising, "you must understand once and for all, Marica, that if you continue to be seen with her, I have no more to say to you. You must choose between Mrs. Touraine and me!"

"And what good will it do Marica, if she chooses you?" a voice like a silver bell struck in suddenly.

It was Nina-Nina who had come in through the half open door, over the soft pile carpet, her light

footstep unheard amidst the clamour of debate.

Marica looked at her in dismay. It was dreadful of Nina to do this, to break into a conversation not intended for her ears, yet as she stood there in her simple grey gown, with her back to the dull purple portière that hung across the doorway, with her head thrown back and the green eyes full of cold enquiry, her attitude was unconsciously dramatic, like La Duse in the second act of "La Gioconda."

"I'm sorry!" Nina said, looking Lady Grundisburgh firmly in the eye, "I couldn't help hearing what you were saying. And I repeat my question—what good will it do Marica if she gives me up?"

Lady Grundisburgh paused, as if doubtful whether to accord this impertinent woman the satisfaction of a reply, then she answered briefly by the question:

"Ýou are Mrs. Touraine, Í suppose?"

"Yes," Nina said briskly, "I am that most objectionable person! And you have come here to-day to tell Marica she is not to go about with me? Well, I agree with you! you understand? I absolutely and entirely agree with you, Lady Grundisburgh!"

"I am delighted to hear it!" that lady answered

freezingly.

Nina came closer and Marica watched her in amazement. She was extraordinary, this little woman with the pretty Greuze-like face that could suddenly set into such hard lines of resistance. Here was the iron hand inside the velvet glove, the girl reflected, as the green eyes flashed fire and the curved lips tightened across the little white teeth. Yet Nina had herself perfectly in hand when she spoke again in a

cold, clear voice, musical as ever.

"Yes, why ought Marica not to go about with me? Shall I tell you? For the simple reason that she ought to go about with you! You have a reputation for philanthropy, but whilst you were organising happy evenings' for German maids and entertaining Colonial delegates, Marica was alone in London, bored to tears, without friends or amusements. What have you done for her yourself? Invited her-" and Nina began ticking off Lady Grundisburgh's benefits on her pretty, pink finger tips, "to a few dull tea-parties, to 'lunch quietly' when no one amusing was expected, introduced her to bores your own daughter wouldn't be bothered with! When you gave a dance her invitation was forgotten! Why didn't you think about 'happy evenings' for Marica? Introduce her to the people who were capable of appreciating her?"

"This is intolerable!" cried Lady Grundisburgh. For the second time in a week she was being taken to task for neglect of this tiresome girl, whose destiny appeared to certain people to be of quite absurd importance. Lord Charles Thane had used exactly the same words only a few days before, and to hear them again from the woman she imagined to be the very one she had designated as "impossible" was more than she could bear. "Marica," she went on, turning her back on Mrs. Touraine and speaking very distinctly: "If after this quite disgraceful scene you still wish to associate with this friend of yours, you are, of course, at liberty to do so. But understand

that in that case—" she paused ominously.
"You disown me?" Marica suggested.
"You must take your choice," said Lady Grundisburgh firmly.

Nina stepped forward and gripped Marica impul-

sively by the arm.

"Darling," she said earnestly, "I know what you're going to say, but don't answer without thinking! Don't consider my feelings! Remember that it's the most foolish thing imaginable for a girl to quarrel with her family and their friends—it gives all the cats of the world a chance to rend her! You aren't fitted to battle with the world, Marica! You haven't the teeth and the claws to hold your own in it. If Lady Grundisburgh is really going to be your friend—" she looked that lady for a moment steadily in the eyes, "don't be a fool and refuse a good offer. I stand out—I'm going!"

Hastily letting go of Marica, she moved towards the door. But the girl sprang after her and slipped her arm through her friend's. She had never loved

her so much as at this moment.

As Nina had stood beside her in the little grey frock they had bought together "off the peg" at a sale in Kensington High Street, and which somehow set off her beauty better than even her loveliest "chiffons," a rush of tender memories came to

Marica. She remembered the first time Nina came up the stairs, towed furiously by Balzac, their first cosy teas over the fire dear kind little Nina, with her arms full of flowers, coming in to cheer her after influenza Nina singing to her, weird little airs from Grieg, plaintive Southern love-songs Nina welcoming her to the little flat in Kensington, gay, entrainante, sympathetic as no one else had ever been to her! And on her other side was Lady Grundisburgh, imposingly dressed after the unimaginative British manner; looking back, Marica saw her too, in a procession of appearances throughout her life, sweeping up the pebble pathway of the Villa bel Riposo bowing graciously from her landau in the Park enthroned behind the tea-table at Grundisburgh House, welcoming Mrs. Samuel P. Malines! And at the last thought Marica's grip on her friend's arm tightened-Nina banned, Bessie Bosham welcomed! At that moment, all the fierce love of justice which was one of her strongest characteristics, flamed out, as she cried:

"I choose Nina!"

Lady Grundisburgh walked towards the door, sweeping Nina and Marica aside as small craft are scattered by an oncoming steamer. But as Marica darted forward to open the door for her, she turned and pronounced the girl's final doom.
"From this time, Marica, you must not expect me

to recognise you!"

The door closed behind her.

CHAPTER VI.

THE rose and white dining-room of the Cosmopolis Restaurant was filled with its usual crowd of Above the strains of the string band, performing selections from "The Marquis and the Mannequin," the clatter of knives and forks and the hurried pad of waiters' feet, rose the clamour of many La bête humaine at feeding time, eight the evening, might be contemplated o'clock in under every aspect. A portly German with glistening eyes could be heard asking loudly for another helping of his Lieblingsgericht: two American young men, whose complexions seemed to be the result of a diet consisting mainly of pâté de foie gras and cocktails, sipped champagne languidly; a Frenchwoman, with flaming hair, from which sprang phoenix-like an orange-coloured bird of paradise, shrieked repartees to the sallies of three admirers; whilst one long table was occupied by the inevitable Jewish family, consisting of sleek, sallow boys, elderly daughters, auntscorpulent but still convivial-cousins to the remotest generation gathered around the bald-headed giver of the feast, whose diamond-studded shirt-front proclaimed an ample ability to pay the bill.

Marica Fayne, looking on at the scene, wondered why she had once found it so enthralling. Only two years ago to dine at the Cosmopolis had seemed to her the height of glorious enjoyment. How she had loved it—the lights, the music, the crowd of revellers, all that made up la vie rieuse, which she had led ever

since she left the Sheep Track.

The Sheep Track! Ah, how long ago it was since she had even thought about it! For, from the time of Lady Grundisburgh's fateful visit to Blenheim Gardens, eighteen months ago, that lady had carried out her ultimatum to the letter and passed Marica in the Park the following Sunday morning, with stonily averted eyes. The sheep who followed in her wake had naturally adopted the same policy; they had not, with the exception of Mrs. Draycott and Birdie, actually cut her, but their preoccupied air when she met them accidentally, left no room for doubt as to their feelings. As Lady Grundisburgh's protégée, Marica was owed civility, but now that she was no longer to be met at Grundisburgh House, and that the great lady was significantly silent at the mention of her name, there was no object in lavishing smiles in her direction.

Marica dismissed them from her thoughts with a shrug of the shoulders. More women, she knew, are cut every day in London for not giving balls, than for any infraction of the ten commandments. She was of no use to the Sheep Track, and of what use was the Sheep Track to her? It led to nowhere! What did the attitude of the sheep matter?

But, from time to time, a new question presented itself—where did this track lead to—the track she had struck out for herself in the world of London? Nina, of course, was a dear, still sweet and kind as ever, but how could she go on eternally with the whirl of gaiety that made up her whole scheme of existence? And now, after two years of this London life, with its cockney merriment and tinkling "smartness," its round of Cosmopolis dinners and Gaiety choruses, of skating, rinking, punting, dancing to the accompaniment of bands playing rag-time and the scent of hot-house flowers in the air, she realised that all these things, which had once charmed and intoxicated her, to-night filled her with a sudden revulsion of feeling and an immense longing for realities.

She longed more than ever for real friends, real affinities. As she looked round the room, watching the faces of the diners, she wondered why it was that

in this sort of place one never caught a glimpse of a face that bore a hint of soul, a trace of aspiration.

And Romance, the true romance, that long ago she dreamt of, seemed as unattainable as ever. Where was it to be found in this London world—here, where people loved languidly for a week or impulsively for an hour, where a man's memory of a woman was wiped out instantly he left her, by the rush of business, the call of sport, or by a hundred other women just as charming! Only a man with iron powers of concentration can develop a grande passion in modern London!

Of course she had had "love-affairs"—of what Nina described as the Impressionist order, executed in a few hasty splashes and all details left to the imagination—a picturesque proposal in a punt on the river, another sitting out between the dances at the Midnight Club. And last week, Pat Kilmurry, before going off to his place in Connemara, had suddenly invited her to share it with him. He had declared himself heart-broken at her refusal, yet she divined his grief to be as deep-seated as the rest of his emotions, all of the musical comedy variety. To laugh, to dance, to sing, to make love to the charmer of the moment—this was Pat's philosophy; to take him seriously would be absurd.

Of all the men she had known, only one stood out from the rest, as a real human form stands out against a background of painted fresco figures. Peter Trent was real; there was a reserve of force at the back of him, which made him different to all these happy-golucky people. Yet somehow it never occurred to her to connect him with romance—he was just a friend, a very dear friend to whom one could say anything, but she had never even wondered whether he loved her. They had talked together of marriage—in the abstract—with the calm dispassionateness of two peripatetic philosophers. "You will never marry," Peter had said to her once. "A woman like you can only marry on the tidal wave of a great emotion."

And the tidal wave had never come—the wave that would carry her out into that wreck-strewn sea, from

which there is no returning.

To-night, as she sat at the dinner-table, listening absent-mindedly to the conversation that was being carried on by the other five members of the party, it seemed to her that there was a futility in their gaiety she had never before detected. Nina, of course, was really amusing, but then nothing could quench Nina's love of revelry. To be in a crowd was the breath of life to her, and to dine at the Cosmopolis a joy that could never pall. Thirty years hence, if Nature found her alive, it would find her still gaily powdering her nose, polishing her nails and skipping into taxis to dash off to theatres and supper-parties.

And so when Winky had said "Let us make a night of it!" Nina had joyfully agreed, and they had decided to dine at the Cosmopolis, look in at a musichall and then repair to Winky's rooms in Cleveland Row to put on masks and dominoes before going on to a ball at Covent Garden. Marica remembered her first Covent Garden ball nearly a year ago—what fun it had been! They had made up a party and taken a box for the night, from which they could look on at the pandemonium down below, only descending into it to dance with the other members of the party.

To-night a different programme had been arranged; the idea of going to the ball had occurred to them too late to secure a box and they had all agreed therefore to Nina's laughing suggestion, to go and take their chance in the crowd. They were to be really Bohemian, ready for any adventure that came their way, and already at dinner, a boisterous hilarity prevailed. Marica alone felt "out of it"—apart. It is easy to say: "Let us eat, drink and be merry!" but perhaps when we come to drink we find that the champagne is flat, and when we try to be merry sometimes we find that we ourselves are flat also.

Across the table, lit by the rose-shaded electric candles, Marica watched Nina's lovely Greuze face

and van Boemen's large one turned admiringly towards it. How could Nina like this heavy man from South Africa so much? For a whole fortnight it had been van Boemen! "Mr. van Boemen wants to motor us down to Brighton!" "Mr. van Boemen is getting up a party for the Grand National!" "You won't mind, dear, if Mr. van Boemen joins us at Prince's?"

On several occasions Marica had excused herself from joining the party, but whenever she came in to tea at Maybury Mansions, van Boemen was sure to appear, bringing offerings of flowers, chocolates, cigarettes, which Nina received with a charming smile. Maisie Temperley seemed equally under the spell of the South African's fascination and had joyfully accepted his invitation to join the party for Covent Garden.

The little dark man with the beetling brows, who sat on Maisie's other side, was Mr. Schlinkenheim, Maisie's latest acquisition. Marica thought him strangely uninspiring, but Nina, to whom she had said so, had answered with a sigh, "Yes, darling, but of course he has simply millions!"

How could Mr. Schlinkenheim's income affect one? Marica wondered. It certainly did not manifest itself in gems of conversation, and she turned to Sir Harry

with comparative relief.

But Winky was less convivial than of yore; his nerves were troubling him, he told Marica plain-

tively.

"I assure you that some days I'm so nervous I'm afraid to cross the street. I stood five whole minutes on an island in Piccadilly yesterday!" he said, lifting his champagne glass with a shaking hand.

"Why not try some soda-water?" It's a splendid cure for nerves!" Marica could not refrain from

suggesting.

But Winky only shook his head dolefully and said

he was past curing.

The evening passed as so many evenings like it had

passed before, and owing to an impromptu supperparty at Winky's, the party of six were late in reaching Covent Garden. Midnight had just struck and the fun was now growing fast and furious. Marica, clinging to Winky's arm, found herself borne along on the tide of heated humanity, to the edge of the crowd that surrounded the ballroom. Tightly jammed between van Boemen and Sir Harry, she stood watching the dancers-Cleopatras, Salomes, Houris, Geishas, grisettes—all gliding, slithering, prancing or merely writhing in the performance of "Bunny-hugs" and "Turkey-trots," crushed against the chests of Vikings, Chanticlers, Haroun-al-Raschids, or slumberously reposing on their shoulders; Semiramis pillowing a crimped yellow head on the arm of a coster-king; Robespierre and Ophelia with arms wildly extended like a windmill rotating on their axis—a human melée of contorted limbs like some strange dream after haschisch.

Viewed from the box she had occupied at the last ball, the scene of revelry had appeared to Marica brilliant and picturesque; now, at close quarters, she was able to study the units of which it was composed. Why, she wondered, were the English so unskilled in the game of masquerading? She remembered the festive crowds at Nice, during the carnival timepeople in every kind of grotesque disguise, who thronged the town at night, singing and dancing gaily along the pavements, or taking hands and executing wild, whirling circles in the middle of the street, heedless of passing traffic, fired only by a native joie de vivre, and the magic of the Southern night. Here it was different; these people, many of them inflamed by the alcohol wherewith the Northerner seeks to woo the spirit of revelry that his temperament cannot supply, had none of the spontaneous gaiety of the nicois. A fierce determination to be festive seemed to animate them, and amongst the crowd of onlookers, the chaff that was being carried on was of the same somewhat ponderous order.

"Hello, dearie, whatever's the matter with you tonight?" a little creature dressed as a pouter pigeon asked van Boemen. The South African responded delightedly; he might not shine in conversation at the dinner-table, but at this sort of repartee he was an adept. Other women soon closed around him-women from whom Marica instinctively shrank away, clasping Winky's arm for protection. What women! Fat boisterous Junos of fifty, their double chins showing beneath their masks; others thin, like birds of prey, unmasked, with grey hair and hard commercial eyes; "perfect ladies" with golden hair, who accosted their intimes in strident cockney accents—ah! why was it that the scarlet devils who had kissed Lord Grundisburgh on the Ouai Massena and were doubtless canaille of the most flagrant kind, still succeeded somehow in being amusing, whilst this mob seemed to the girl unrelieved by any spark of humour!

"Sir Harry," she cried suddenly, looking up appealingly into Winky's more than unusually jovial countenance, "couldn't we manage to get out of this?" As she spoke she realised that a tall man with a black moustache like the villain of an Adelphi melodrama, was staring at her fixedly. Only a few moments before he had passed her, then he had turned and come back evidently with the intention of looking at her more closely; now, she suddenly realised that he was going to speak to her.

"Do let us move out of this!" she repeated again eagerly, and Sir Harry with a cheery "Right-oh,"

made way for her through the crowd.

But they had not gone further than the entrance to the ballroom when she saw that the dark man was following them, and the next moment he had stepped forward and seized Marica's wrist in a grip of iron.

"Bettina!" he hissed between his teeth in the approved manner of the stage villain, "how dared you stand there in front of me, smiling-yes, I know you are smiling behind your mask—when you knew I could recognise you under any disguise! You, the woman I have loved for years and trusted implicitly! Why did you lie to me, Bettina?" The grasp on her wrist

tightened.

"Please let go—you are hurting me," Marica cried helplessly, and turned her head to look for Winky and call him to the rescue. But, to her dismay, Winky only leant limply against the wall laughing weakly.

"Bettina!" the villain went on angrily, "do you really suppose that by changing your voice in that absurd way you can put me off? Do you think there is another woman in the world with your chin? You are false, Bettina, I tell you—false!"

Suddenly taking both her small wrists in one of his hands he slid his other hand up to her left elbow.

"My bracelet!" he gasped, "it is gone! And you swore, you swore, Bettina, never to take it off!"

Marica was terrified, the man's face was livid with fury, but still Winky only leant against the wall and laughed instead of coming to her aid. Then suddenly she understood. Winky was drunk, feebly, foolishly drunk-there was no protection to be looked for from that quarter. She was alone with this furious stranger -possibly a dangerous lunatic, who might at any moment whip out a revolver and shoot her through the heart. What was to be done? Nina was nowhere to be seen; Maisie and Mr. Schlinkenheim had joined the dancers. She looked round desperately for anyone who would come to her rescue—even van Boemen would be welcome now! And at that moment two tall figures came round the corner of the passage—a fair man and a dark man, walking arm in arm, a rollicking, yet obviously sober gaiety on their faces.

" Tim!"

Before she knew what she was doing, she had called his name! For suddenly in the fair man she had recognised the "glorious morning face" seen long ago in the monkey-house, and again that day at Lord's, with the small boy looking up at it affectionately and asking "Tim's" advice.

Instinctively she knew the world to which he

belonged—the world to which she herself had once belonged and out of which she had drifted into the one where such situations as this were possible. And just as the captive European in the clutches of a cannibal tribe sees with sudden awful relief the face of a white man among the swarthy crowd, she recognised in this man one of her own kind who would come to her rescue. In the desperation of the moment it struck her as quite a brilliant idea to make use of her accidental knowledge of his name, thereby arousing his interest, and at the same time conveying to her assailant that the newcomer had a right to protect her.

At the familiar sound of his own name, the fair young man turned towards her with a startled look of interest in his blue eyes, and unlinking his arm from his friend's—whom at that moment Marica recognised as Captain Harding, one of the men she had met at Mrs. Sherwood's—he came forward and

stood at Marica's side.

"What are you doing to this lady?" he demanded angrily.

"This lady is my affair, not yours!" retorted the man, who believed himself to be grasping the per-

fidious Bettina by the wrists.

"But I'm not, I'm not!" cried Marica, plaintively, "it's all a mistake. This man is determined that he knows me—that I am someone he calls Bettina—but I'm not Bettina!"

"Why not unmask and prove it then?"

"I can't—he is holding my hands!"

"Let go of the lady's hands at once, d'you hear?" said Tim, laying a heavy hand on the man's shoulder.

Immediately he relaxed his grasp.

Marica was just about to unmask when suddenly she remembered—she must not allow Tim to see her face—there must be no possibility of recognition if they met elsewhere. So taking advantage of his stepping away a few paces, she hastily turned her back on him and lifting the mask for a second

only, she gave the other man a hasty glimpse of her features.

"Good Lord, I was mistaken! But, but—" he stammered incoherently.

"But now you see what a silly ass you've made of yourself, you'd better clear out and leave this lady to me!" said Tim, coming forward again.

"Charmed, I'm sure!" said Bettina's adorer, with the elaborate politeness of a man who knows that he is always "a perfect gentleman under any circumstances," and bowing as he moved away. Captain Harding, with an understanding smile, strolled off down the corridor towards the ballroom, and Marica was left alone with her rescuer.

"Thank you so much!" she said in a small shaky voice, looking up at him and wondering how she was to escape from this fresh predicament.

"My dear little lady, I was only too glad to be any help to you, especially as we seem to know each other—though I haven't the ghost of an idea yet who you are! You were careful not to let me have a peep behind that mask of yours, but I'm dying to know who my little friend is!"

"Don't you really remember me?" she asked lightly. Now that she had embarked on this adventure the deception must be carried through with all the ready wit of masquerade.

Tim shook his head. "No, not a bit. Are we old friends?" he asked, coming nearer and looking through the holes of her mask with smiling curiosity.

"Yes, quite old friends!" she said smiling back at him, and indeed, she felt they were. That day in the monkey-house he had seemed, as he did now, someone she had once known quite well—perhaps in a former existence. Yes, that must be it—she and Tim were old affinities who had met again by the force of Karma, that silken thread that runs through all our lives, uniting them like pearls upon a string.

"You must come and dance with me. Bettina!"

Tim said gaily, "I must call you Bettina, you see,

until I find out who you really are!"

Marica hesitated. What was she to do? She wanted more than anything in the world to dance the heavenly waltz of Lehar's that was now floating from the ballroom, with this delightful long-lost friend, yet the voice of Mrs. Grundy, that blighter of all joyous impulses, croaked pitilessly in her ears. Dance with a man she did not know? A man who had never been introduced to her, or worse still, a man to whom she had introduced herself But another voice, a charming well-bred voice was speaking too in caressing tones that mingled with the waltz tune and set her brain dancing.

"Do say yes, Bettina! I shall be so awfully disappointed if you go and leave me now—just one dance, won't you?"

Bother Mrs. Grundy! Was that dreary moralist worth sacrificing all the joy of life to? What did one get out of it if one remained her slavish votary? What were her rewards compared to the satisfying of the desires of youth? *Ie remplis ma jeunesse!* No. old age should never have to reproach her with tonight! She could not resist-it was no good struggling!

A moment later she was whirling round the room on the waves of the compelling melody, moving to perfect music with the one man in the world who had the power to thrill her—for the fascination he had held for her that day in the monkey-house was doubled, now that he held her in his arms and that

his blue eyes were smiling down into hers.

"Shall we go and sit out up there?" he asked, nodding at the row of boxes in the grand tier, as the music stopped. "Some of us have got a box for the evening and we'll have it all to ourselves for a bit."

"Oh, yes," she assented eagerly. It would be such a relief to get out of the pandemonium which was now growing every moment wilder. Tim made way for her through the crowd and led her upstairs to the corridor where doors bearing familiar names caught her eyes as they went along. "The Earl of Grundisburgh," "Samuel Malines, Esq."—she had never been invited to Lady Grundisburgh's box, that was an honour reserved for ambassadresses, or the wives and daughters of Canadian delegates, she thought with a little impish grin of defiance at the cardboard label as she passed.

Tim threw open a door and they entered a large

box containing six armchairs.

"How peaceful and nice this is!" Marica said with a sigh, sinking into one of them and looking down at the surging crowd below. "I had lost the rest of my party when you came by and was wondering how I should ever find them again in that mob."

"Ah, you're here with a party? You must stay here with me till you find them again. Do you see

any of them now?"

Yes, she saw Winky hustling unsteadily about the ballroom with a hilarious lady dressed as a bumble-bee, but she could not bring herself to own up to him, and drew back into the shelter of the box to avoid his recognising her.

Tim was quick to notice the movement.

"You don't want to be seen up here? We'll pull the chairs further back—shall we?"

"Yes," she agreed and then added confidentially,

"my husband is so jealous!"

Her spirits were rising at the fun of this adventure. Casting off all scruples, she threw herself into the spirit of the masquerade with the light-heartedness that only a youth spent under Southern skies makes possible. The laughing lies that deceive no one and form the game of carnival were soon slipping glibly from her lips, and she was confiding to her sympathetic listener her fears lest her husband should recognise her in the box and make a scene like Bettina's admirer.

"What is he like?" Tim asked seriously, "we

must keep a look-out for him!"

"Oh, rather short—"

"And stout, of course!"

"Very. He is wearing a white waistcoat."

"And an enormous watch-chain!"

- "Yes. With several seals and the key of the wine-cellar attached to it!"
 - "Side-whiskers, I suppose?"
 No, an Imperial beard!"

" Grev?"

"A sort of nutmeg colour!"

He burst into a laugh. "What a pleasing picture! But how is it, Bettina, that I can't guess who you are? I don't think I could forget an old friend with such a remarkable husband!" And then, drawing his chair nearer hers he became suddenly serious. "Oh, Bettina, now we're all alone, won't you slip off your mask and let me see who you really are?"

Marica looked at him for a moment without speaking. "I wonder," she said, at last, "whether you'll be very angry when you know the truth."

"How could I be angry with you?" he said.

"Then if I unmask will you swear to me on your word of honour never to betray me if we met again—anywhere else?"

"Of course I swear. You can trust me, you know

that, don't you?"

Yes, she knew she could trust him. Where men were concerned her instinct was almost unerring, and just as she knew that van Boemen's atmosphere was all that she could not bear, she felt that in this man's she could breathe happily. He was so clean, so wholesome with his shining fair hair and healthy bricky skin and the clear eyes of which even the whites were blue with health, so dear and simple too—more like Adeline's "Mr. Green" than any man she had met before; he had the same happy outdoor look which seemed to her so tremendously attractive. She felt sure he lived the same sort of life as Mr. Green—close to Nature, to the realities. Yes, with Tim she knew she was quite safe.

She took off her mask.

There was a moment of silence whilst he looked into her face, and she wondered whether he could hear her heart beating in the sudden stillness.
"And so," he said at last, "we don't know each

other?"

"No," she said, "we've never met before. Are you very angry with me?"

"Why should I be angry with you?" he asked

gently.

"For taking you in!"

"But that's the fun of these kind of shows, isn't it? And it makes the situation all the more amusing! How did you know who I am, I wonder?"

"I dont know who you are!"

And then she told him about the day at the Zoo and how the keeper had talked of him and she had wondered who he was; and then how she had seen him again at Lord's and heard the small boy call him by his name.

"And you remembered? You hoped that we should meet?" he said eagerly, and then added boyishly, "Wasn't it simply splendid that I happened to come here to-night? I'm so glad, so awfully

glad!"

After that they talked no more nonsense. In that one moment, when he looked into her face, it seemed to Marica that they had passed out of the surface world of light flirtation into a region new and strange and wonderful. "Where am I drifting to?" she cried to herself helplessly. For she was talking to this man, whom an hour ago, she had never spoken to, as if she had known him all her life. Even with Peter it had never been like this—their conversations were of all the things she cared about, yet they had remained impersonal. But with this man it was all different. They talked of everything under the sunbooks, music, gardening, the animals at the Zoo-yet always with the personal note running through it, the perpetually recurring "I" and "You," with which two new-found affinities feel in the dark for

each other's souls.

"Do you know, Bettina, I must still call you Bettina till I know better," Tim said earnestly, "You're the most awfully understanding person I've ever met in my life. I've never talked to any woman in this way before. What is there about you that is so different from other women—the women and girls one usually meets in society?"

"Don't you like society girls?"

"Can't stand them as a rule. What is there to like in them?"

"Isn't it perhaps that you don't get to know them

really?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Life's not long enough. Now meeting anyone like you—oh, Bettina," he broke off suddenly, "we must meet again somehow. I can't let you go out of my life after to-night. Won't you tell me your name?"

"Call me Mrs. Maxwell," she said hastily, hitting

on the first undistinctive name that occurred to her, and then added: "And will you tell me your other

"Oh, my name is Windlesham."

"Windlesham! You are Lord Windlesham?" He nodded.

Suddenly it all came back to her-Lord Windlesham. The elusive Lord Windlesham whom the girls at the Morecambes' tea-parties were unable to secure for any purpose—who would not trim hats at bazaars

or make one of a party for a dance!
"I have heard of you," she began and then stopped. For he must never know that she belonged to this class he spent his life in eluding. It was better he should think her a skittish married woman, a gay grass-widow, or even an actress with the unconventional tendencies permitted to the artistic temperament-anything rather than a jeune fille concealing beneath her surface irresponsibility, a serious design on his celibacy. She knew of course that he was a well-known parti, three-starred probably on the asterisked list with which Mr. Erdington was known to provide new hostesses—no wonder that Tim fled the path of these intrepid huntresses.

"Tell me when we can meet again, Bettina," he was saying eagerly, but at that moment voices

sounded outside the door of the box.

Marica grasped her mask in alarm, and had only just time to slip it on when a party of people came noisily in, led by Captain Harding. They were all laughing loudly over some episode of the ball.

"And now he has gone off in a cab with his own wife!" Harding shouted, joyfully slapping Tim on the back to emphasise the story.

" Who?"

"Teddy. Thought he'd got hold of no end of a good thing and it was little Mrs. Teddy herself."

"I bet he looks a bit sick when she unmasks at supper!" said a familiar voice from behind the

vashmak of a fair-haired odalisque.

Cynthia Brinton! So there were girls as well as young men in society who found a Covent Garden ball more entertaining than the dances on the Sheep Track to which they belonged! However, if one had straved it was wiser to keep the fact even from another strayer, so Marica carefully avoided recognition and sat silently listening to the conversation. Cynthia, it transpired, was chaperoned to-night by the lady in discreet black who, in raising her mask for an instant, revealed herself as no other than the famous Lady Bembridge whom Marica, like everyone else in London, knew by sight as one of the most popular leaders of the gay world.

After a few moments Tim grasped Captain Harding by the arm and introduced him to "Mrs. Maxwell."

Harding sat down and began to talk. He was quite nice and "cheery," but he had none of Tim's charm or spontaneous gaiety. How easy it was to recognise the followers of the Sheep Track! Suddenly she realised that "the good moment had gone," the interest of the adventure had ended and she got up from her chair.

"I must be going," she said, turning to Lord Windlesham. "My friends will be looking for me."

"Let me help you to find them," he said, opening the door of the box, and as they made their way downstairs, he bent towards her and said gently: "Dear little lady, don't vanish altogether out of my life! Now we've found each other we must meet again. Won't you tell me your real name and where you live?"

She shook her head. No, it would never do to tell him that—to let him find out that she was one of the girls he found so boring, and whom he spent his time avoiding. Only as an episode quite off the Sheep Track, as the mysterious "Mrs. Maxwell" of Covent Garden could she hope to retain his interest.

At this moment, catching sight of Nina's yellow domino at the entrance to the ballroom, she gave him her hand and murmured enigmatically: "No, no, the future lies in the lap of the gods!" The next moment she had disappeared into the crowd.

CHAPTER VII.

WITH the sober light of a wet spring morning shining through the windows, and the appearance of her morning chocolate—frothed up by Adolphe and deposited at her bedside by Léontine—Marica wondered whether the happenings at the Covent Garden ball were a dream or a reality. Had she really met him at last. the man with the "glorious morning face" which for the past four years had never faded from her memory, or would she awake to find that it was all a trick of the sub-conscious brain, that other 'ego' which wanders in dreams through the strange worlds of imaginings. But as the mists of sleep rolled away, she knew that it was all true, she had really lived through those wonderful hours, really felt Tim's blue eyes looking into hers and heard him saying, "Now we have found each other we must meet again!" With a thrill the words of Emerson recurred to her: I come to my own we shall both know it!" night they had both known it! Were they mad or Mad, she had told herself, seven hours ago as she closed her eyes sleepily on her pillow—the morning would bring sanity! But it had not done so, nor as it wore on, did the day. At dinner, looking across the table at her father wrapped in a Nirvana of intellectual abstraction, the thought of her folly came home to her with a fresh poignancy. What would Papa say if he knew everything? If he knew that the daughter he had brought up on the wisdom of the ancients, to contemplate beauty, had spent the past night at Covent Garden dancing with and talking to a man she had never met before, the thought of whom now occupied her to the exclusion of all other considerations? How horrified he would be! Yet though

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looking at the adventure through his eyes, she told herself that nothing could come of such a night of folly, she simply could not manage to regret it! For a brief moment, at any rate, she had found romance real and vivid-in this world of prose or sham emotions—this in itself, was a possession to take with her to the grave! She thought of the women she had known who had never lived through such moments -women like her aunts, the Baileys. Adeline Morecambe as she might have been if she had never let herself go-and clenched her fists with a sudden "Ah, better any fate than that!" she vehemence. told herself, "an empty life, an unused youth, that would be the real horror to look back upon! it be better when one is old and desire faileth to feel faint remorse for the follies of one's youth, yet still to smile and thrill at the remembrance as at the after taste of a feast, than to sit in the twilight of old age, remembering only a colourless youth, warped with scruples and haunted by ghostly might-have-beens?"

Nina, to whom she told the whole story, was

delighted at Marica's latest adventure.

"How exciting, darling! Of course you know Lord Windlesham's supposed to be the most fascinating man in London. Maisie Temperley met him once staying in a country house, and said he was quite irresistible!"

Marica felt a sudden chill; for the first time since meeting him she remembered the stories she had heard of Tim's powers of fascination, and she hated to think that other women felt his charm as she had done; it had seemed something so personal, something for her alone, she could not imagine him one of the fatuous creatures, male Lady Clara Vere de Veres, who go about making "victims." She was thankful she had shown no empressement at parting and determined, if they ever met again, to be more than ever elusive. But would they meet again? London was so vast that unless one moved along the same track, the chances of a second encounter were infinitesimal. Yet it was

just possible that at some of the public places she frequented with Nina—the Park, the river, Ranelagh—such a glorious coincidence might occur. No doubt he went to race-meetings, and for the first time she agreed eagerly to join a party for one of these events, which so far had held no interest for her. She loved horses, but only as she loved all animals, to be made friends of, not as a means to increasing one's income; and the canaille of the race-course, the heated crowds reeking of beer and bad tobacco, the tipsy women and yelling 'bookies,' seemed to her strangely unattractive. Yet, if amidst these sordid surroundings, there was a chance of encountering the face that was never long absent from her thoughts, they could be endured.

One morning in May, Nina fluttered into the house

full of elation.

"Marica," she cried gaily, "I've had a charming invitation for you and me! You've heard Maisie talk of the Davenant Hewetsons?"

Yes, Marica remembered. Mrs. Davenant Hewetson was the fairy godmother to whom Maisie owed many little treats and presents. It was Mrs. Davenant Hewetson who had given her the seal musquash coat which had been made for Mrs. Hewetson in Paris and proving a misfit, had been bequeathed to the slimmer Maisie. Many women of limited means. Marica had noticed, found millionairess friends an excellent solution to the increasing problem of existence, whilst, on their part, millionairesses of waning charms found younger and more attractive women, who "knew their way about," and could always be depended on to "bring a man," well worth the theatre tickets and expensive chiffons bestowed upon them. Nina had already several of such benefactresses, and having introduced Maisie to them, it was only fair play on the part of Maisie to introduce Nina to her latest discovery, Mrs. Davenant Hewetson.

"Mrs. Hewetson was perfectly charming to me, Marica," Nina explained, "and asked me at once to join her house-party for Ascot. And then she went

on to say she'd heard of you from Maisie and wanted you to come too.

"But why should she want me?" Marica asked

in surprise.

"Well, you see, dear, Mrs. Davenant Hewetson doesn't know many people yet. She can always get men because her son brings them home, and the girls have plenty of young men too, but she wants to get the right sort of women to her parties. And she's really the kindest creature in the world."

"Oh, I see! The Davenant Hewetsons haven't

quite arrived yet?"

"No, not quite. In fact, till lately they lived peacefully in Hampstead and had no social ambitions at all. Maisie met them staying at a hotel in East-bourne where the two girls thought they were having a splendid time playing tennis in Devonshire Park and joining in hotel dances. It took her quite a long while to unsettle them."

"Why did she want to unsettle them?"

"Oh, as she said, it seemed a pity to see so much good money going to waste. She discovered, you see, that they had millions and were getting no fun out of it at all. And she succeeded at last in firing Mrs. Hewetson with the determination to get into society."

"And will she get into it?"
"No doubt—in time!" Nina said, with a little "It's quite easy if you've push enough. And though Mrs. Hewetson's kind, she's also pachydermatous."

Yes, that was essential, Marica reflected, remembering the success that had attended Sadie B. Funk's efforts. She had heard, too, of Mr. Erdington's early reverses and how society, which had at first offered an iron resistance to his blandishments, had, since it had been given the lead, prided itself on receiving invitations to his dullest parties. But in both cases, a bell-wether had come to the rescue. The sheep of society allow themselves to be tempted by no fresh pastures, however luxuriant, until a bell-wether has approved the grazing.

"And is Maisie going to act as bell-wether?" she

asked.

"No, Maisie hasn't influence enough, that's just why she introduced the Hewetsons to Mrs. Darsie Marling."

"And who is Mrs. Darsie Marling?"

"Oh, a sister of Lord Learmouth's, I believe, and some relation of the Duke of Brentwood's—very hard up but knows everybody. And she determined to launch the Davenant Hewetsons. The Ascot party was her idea, she found the house and has asked several of her friends to come. Do come, Marica, it's sure to be amusing!"

Yes, that was quite possible. Marica had no prejudice against social climbers, for as her brief experience of society had shown her, climbers are no longer a class apart, but in the frenzied scuffle up the social ladder few are content to associate with people on their own rung—all are equally anxious to "go one better."

"Yes, I'll come, Nina, it sounds quite amusing!" she agreed, but in her heart, she knew that her chief reason for wishing to join this house-party was the

possibility of meeting Tim at Ascot races.

It was a lovely afternoon in June when she arrived with Nina at Upminster Court—a long, low house of the Edwardian-Elizabethan style of architecture, standing in an undulating garden laid out, regardless of expense, by the famous landscape-gardener, employed for the purpose. After the dusty journey from London, the white tea-tables, spread beneath the shade of the cedars at the far end of the lawn, loomed like a vision of Paradise. A gourmet's Paradise too! thought Marica, as she contemplated the bewildering choice of food and drinks provided—hock cup and iced coffee beside the huge hissing tea-urn, every conceivable kind of sandwich, pyramids of strawberries and silver jugs of cream.

Mrs. Davenant Hewetson rose from her seat behind the tea-pot and extended a plump arm in greeting.

"So delighted to see you both! Come and sit by me, darling!" she added to Nina, patting a red-

cushioned chair at her side.

It was evident, Marica reflected, as she sipped a cup of perfect coffee with creamy icicles floating on the top, that Nina was right in her description of their hostess. Mrs. Davenant Hewetson was obviously filled to the brim with the milk of human kindness, and there were no traces of struggle on her pleasant peach-like countenance. Her daughters, Imogen and Gwladys, who strolled up after a few moments, followed by several young men, seemed equally good-natured. apparently quite young, that first hint of coming embonpoint, the disappearing line of the jaw, had shown itself—one could not say exactly where their faces stopped and their necks began; yet their expressions were so kindly, so full of healthy contentment, that they were really not unpleasing. But in "Josh" Davenant Hewetson, the pride and hope of his adoring mother and sisters, Marica could find no redeeming feature. He was like a fat white pig, with sleek hair so fair and so carefully flattened to his head, that in the distance he appeared to be bald. Josh, Marica soon discovered, was a social oracle of no small magnitude in his family circle, as a member of the Stock Exchange he was au fait of all the bon mots and society scandals which makes business a pleasure in that temple of wit.

One after another the rest of the house-party were introduced to the newly-arrived guests by their hostess, with confidential asides, descriptive of each one's claims to attention. For like most English hostesses, not excepting Lady Grundisburgh, who aspire to the reputation for collecting "interesting" people at their houses, Mrs. Davenant Hewetson adhered to the label form of introduction, and if her guests' labels wore less imposing inscriptions than those who frequented Grundisburgh House, she was

an adept at the skilful patter required to enhance their value. It is the business of the showman to make the most of the merits of his troupe, whether they be forest-

bred lions, or mere performing fleas.

"Dear Mrs. Darsie Marling, so charming! so well-connected!" she whispered to Marica as that lady, with a languid nod, sank into a cane-chair offered her by "Josh." Looking at her across the tea-table, Marica could only think of one adjective—rusty; Mrs. Darsie Marling's rusty-brown hair was matted on her forehead, her rusty black gown hung limply from her shoulders, her massive gold jewellery was dull and tarnished. But when everyone knows that one is the cousin of a duke, one can permit oneself a little carelessness of attire with impunity.

At this moment the girl's attention was speedily diverted by another welcoming cry from her hostess.

"Ah, Lady Belturbet, may I introduce Miss Fayne?" and a little woman, more like a Chinese pug than anything human Marica had ever seen before, held out a hand adorned with baroque pearls the size of gooseberries. Seen from the other end of the lawn, she had looked like thirty-five, but now on closer inspection it was evident that she dated from about the Indian Mutiny. She wore a low-necked muslin dress, whilst a string of enormous amber beads nestled amongst her chins. As she shook hands with Marica, the head of a diminutive "griffon" shot out with a bark of fury from beneath her arm.

"Naughty! naughty! Be quiet, Zaza!" she exclaimed playfully, tapping the little dog on the nose, and to Marica she added soothingly:

"It's all right, dear, Zaza won't really bite you!

It's just her way to bark like that!"

It was left to General Blennerville, a rubicund hero with a faded but still amorous eye, who was next introduced to Marica, to affix Lady Belturbet's label a little later on.

"Delightful woman, Lady Belturbet! You should

hear some of her stories—quite 'cayenne,' you know! Ha! Ha!"

But the pièce de resistance of the party at this

moment made his appearance at the tea-table.

"Lord Cressage!" Mrs. Davenant Hewetson announced complacently, and a tall young man, with short side whiskers, attired in prune-coloured Shantung silk, the coat tightly fitting round his neatly corsetted waist and fastened in the front with an immense cabochon amethyst, paused in the act of helping himself to a caviare sandwich and bowed low with his hand on his heart.

"So clever, so original!" murmured Mrs. Davenant Hewetson in an undertone to Marica, "you have never heard of him in London—no? He goes everywhere, though, and is so in request! He revived the fashion of the eighteenth century gallant, you know! Isn't it too charming?"

Maisie Temperley came up a moment later, escorted by Mr. Schlinkenheim, whom she had brought with her from London.

"It's too glorious here, dear Mrs. Hewetson!" she exclaimed, sinking luxuriously into a hammock chair, whilst "Josh" hurried forward to arrange a cushion behind her head. She cast her china blue eyes up at him in a way that never failed to affix any man to her side for at least five minutes. It did not fail now, for "Josh" lowered himself with ponderous agility on to another cushion at her feet.

Mrs. Davenant Hewetson looked round the circle with beaming approval. Her party, she felt, was really going to be a success. Already they were all pairing off in the way that signified their approval of their fellow guests; General Blennerville was listening with gleaming eyes to the little story that Lady Belturbet was telling him in a discreet undertone; Lord Cressage was murmuring old-world compliments to Mrs. Darsie Marling; Mr. Schlinkenheim was gazing adoringly at Nina; whilst Imogen and Gwladys were carrying

on a fire of chaff with two young men who hovered round, plying them with strawberries and creams.

When tea was over, the party melted away again, and across the lawn Marica, left alone at the tea-table with Mrs. Davenant Hewetson, could catch glimpses of light gowns and manly forms moving, always in couples, down shady alleys and into summer-houses.

They seemed to have no use for each other collectively, and when they met again at dinner, later on, the conversation never became general, but split up

into a series of tête-à-têtes all round the table.

Marica, sitting between Mr. Schlinkenheim and General Blennerville, found every remark met with a friendliness far more disconcerting than the *gêne* she had met with long ago in society. Personalities, she discovered, may form the most agreeable or the most offensive form of conversation. It was impossible to converse with any of these people without their immediately becoming personal.

"What do you think of the fair Gwladys's looks this evening?" asked General Blennerville, rolling his head towards Marica and then proceeding to scrutinize his hostess' youngest daughter across the table. "How do you like the colour of her gown?"

"I think it charming."

"Do you? Now, do you? I prefer black to anything for a woman to wear in the evening," he went on, fixing a hungry eye on Marica's shoulder, emerging from the edge of her black chiffon gown, "shows up the skin tints so much better. I always say—"but, to his surprise, he found himself talking to the back of Marica's burnished brown head as she turned to continue the conversation with Mr. Schlinkenheim on her other side.

"How lovely the flowers are!" she remarked

abruptly.

He looked up at her, blushing with pleasure at being spoken to by this lovely girl, whom he had hitherto looked upon as quite unattainably distinguished. Mr. Schlinkenheim was a humble soul, too unaccustomed as

yet to the position conferred on him by his lately inherited millions to feel the seasoned millionaire's

confidence in his powers of attraction.

"Are you fond of flowers?" he asked eagerly, glancing for the first time at the pink roses massed along the middle of the table. "If so, perhaps you would allow me to send you some?"

"Thank you very much. Are you fond of gardening? Have you a garden?" she went on, hoping she had hit on a subject which could by no possibility

lead to personalities. He shook his head.

"Oh, no, I haven't any garden as yet, though I am looking out for a country place with good grounds, you understand? But what I was going to say was, couldn't I give 'Gérard'-the florist in Regent Street, you know—a standing order to send you round flowers every Monday?"

"Oh, please don't think of it-"

"But if you only knew what pleasure it would give me!" he said eagerly. "The fact is, I really don't know what to spend money on!"

"A grouse moor would use up a good deal, wouldn't

it?" she suggested.

"Yes, but I can't shoot-couldn't hit a thing!" he said sadly.

"What about a box at the Opera?"

"I did try that, but I simply couldn't keep awake."

"Have you thought of yachting?"
I am always so terribly ill on the sea!"

"It certainly does seem difficult," Marica agreed

sympathetically.

"I have sometimes thought," he began with a sudden shy impulsiveness, "that if I met a girl who

would forgive my not being very brilliant-"

But what course Mr. Schlinkenheim proposed taking if he ever encountered a spinster so magnanimous Marica never knew, for at this moment a sudden and unexpected interruption occurred.

A momentary lull had fallen on the rest of the party

and Lord Cressage—who had exchanged his prune Shantung "lounge suit" for an evening coat of moonlight blue and black silk knee breeches—sitting opposite Marica was seen to be contemplating her musingly through his single eye-glass.

"I have been wondering," he remarked at this point, in an inward voice which was nevertheless resonantly audible all round the table, "what it is of which my fair vis-à-vis reminds me! At last I see!—

it is 'The Soul's Awakening'!"

Immediately every eye around the festive board was focussed on Marica's scarlet countenance, and a ripple of appreciative mirth ran round the circle of guests.

"Dear Lord Cressage! So witty! So amusing!" Mrs. Davenant Hewetson, who sat next him, could be

heard murmuring appreciatively.

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There was no doubt that the party at Upminster Court "described well"; and that, of course, in

modern entertaining is half the battle.

"Amongst the guests that Mr. and Mrs. Davenant Hewetson are entertaining at their charming country place, Upminster Court, for Ascot races, are Lord Cressage, General Sir Montacute Blennerville, K.C.B., Lady Belturbet, the Honourable Mrs. Darsie Marling, etc."

It sounded really very distinguished, thought Marica, as she read the paragraph in the *Outsider*, placed thoughtfully on her breakfast tray. She had eagerly agreed to the suggestion of her hostess that she should

remain in bed to breakfast.

"You don't look at all strong, dearie!" Mrs. Davenant Hewetson had observed several times with kindly concern, adding as she surveyed her guest's slender proportions: "There is really nothing of you, you know!"

No, compared to Imogen and Gwladys, there was not. Marica knew that there was no malice in Mrs. Davenant Hewetson's condolences; she was genuinely

concerned for the health of any girl who did not turn the scale at eleven stone.

"Have you ever tried cod liver oil or Maltine?"

she enquired solicitously.

"No, I haven't tried anything. I don't know that I particularly want to be fat!" said Marica smiling.

"Well, perhaps with draped skirts coming in again, you may be right and of course they do look charming on you—even better than on Imogen and Gwladys!" Mrs. Davenant Hewetson magnanimously agreed. That was the most embarrassing thing about the Davenant Hewetsons, they were so really kind through and through, that it made one hate oneself for even noticing their shortcomings. Mrs. Davenant Hewetson was, with the exception of Lady Morecambe, the first mother of marriageable daughters, who had shown any disinterested kindness to Marica. For the girl knew she had no designs on her as a daughter-in-law—"Josh" must marry into "the aristocracy," and thus enroll the name of Davenant-Hewetson in the sacred pages of Debrett.

Yet, with the exception of "Josh," the Davenant Hewetsons were probably not more snobbish than many people in more exalted circles. Snobbery in England is no longer a peculiarity of parvenus, it has permeated all classes and ceased to excite derision. Everyone now-a-days has learnt the value of advertisement, and the titles which people once wore unobtrusively, have been shown them—principally by America—to be a social asset it is mere folly not to make the most of. If a casual allusion to "my uncle the Duke" brings material advantage in the shape of invitations to shoot or extended credit from tradesmen, why

refrain from it?

It was a shrewd perception of this truth, rather than an innate adoration of rank, that animated the Davenant Hewetsons. Mrs. Darsie Marling had shown them the necessity of cultivating the members of the "smart set" that she invited to their house, and accordingly they welcomed such ornaments of that world as

Lord Cressage, Lady Belturbet, and General Blennerville, with the uncritical kindliness that characterized them. Yet their social aspirations in no way affected their loyalty to their old friends, and from time to time they threw out disquieting hints of their intention to invite them to the ball that Mrs. Darsie Marling had planned they should give at the Ritz at the end of the season, with guests chosen by herself. The presence of Captain Chatburn of the R.A.M.C., with whom the girls had made friends at Eastbourne, and Mr. Topping, a "nut" in the motor trade invited by "Josh," at the Ascot house-party, was a matter of no little annoyance to Mrs. Darsie Marling but, as Mrs. Davenant Hewetson had explained, they amused Imogen and Gwladys and were really "very cheery young fellows to have in the house." Both girls were enjoying themselves immensely; the hope of Guardsmen in the future, that Mrs. Darsie Marling held out to them, did not damp their appreciation of the present moment, and with the overflowing good nature that comes of perfect contentment, they wanted Marica to enjoy it too. It was a pity she did not seem to get as much fun out of the house-party as they did-perhaps it was her health? Yet she assured them that she felt perfectly well!

On her part Marica strove in vain to conceal the embarrassment with which these people filled her and as the day wore on, she wondered desperately on what pretext she could cut short her visit and fly back to London. They were not to go racing till to-morrow and "a quiet day in the grounds" was the programme provided for the guests. Anything less quiet Marica had never experienced. The "pairing off system" that prevailed, necessitated a presence of mind that left no time for repose; though by dint of coming down late in the morning, and again taking refuge in her room on the plea of resting in the afternoon, she cut short the day, there were still long hours of the afternoon and evening during which ceaseless ingenuity must be brought into play in order to avoid the tête-à-têtes

with which she found herself threatened at every moment.

If she played the piano in the music-room, an audience of one instantly assembled; if she sank into a chair beneath the cedars, a manly form immediately stretched itself on the grass at her side; if she crept away to read in a secluded corner of the garden, some sleuth-like footstep was certain to make itself heard behind her. It was useless attempting to elude her admirers by clinging to the society of the other women. The women refused to be clung to. Each was too whole-heartedly engaged in attracting the attention of her particular swain, to have time for any member of her own sex, and after listening absentmindedly to Marica's efforts at conversation, would get up with an air of elaborate casualness and wander away in search of him.

There was a pathos about this, the girl reflected, for though they could not forgive her for attracting,

they so readily forgive the attracted.

By the evening she realised miserably that she had succeeded in making several of the women furiously jealous. Mrs. Darsie Marling had flaunted in vain, her cousin "the dear Duke" for the benefit of Lord Cressage, who listened abstractedly to her recollections and followed Marica's movements through his gold eye-glass. Maisie Temperley had sung passionate ballads in a throbbing soprano, which entirely failed to attract the attention of "Josh," who dogged Marica's footsteps round the verandah, deaf to the allurements of his former Circe; and Lady Belturbet found herself deserted by General Blennerville, who after assuring her hurriedly that he adored the Rubens type of woman, sprang from her side to follow Marica down a shady path and tell her how he worshipped the lines of her willowy figure. Yet she had done nothing to invite the attentions of which she was the writhing victim; indeed, her obvious shrinking from them had seemed to spur their perpetrators into fresh efforts, who in the intervals of amorous tête-à-têtes

with the former objects of their admiration, snared her into secluded corners and without preliminary, bombarded her with outrageous compliments, seized her hand or flung their arms round her waist. It was not safe to be alone with one of them!

The evening was fine and warm, and when coffee and cigarettes were over, "Josh" proposed that the party should once more migrate to the garden. Marica, resisting all efforts to lead her away into the romantic summer twilight, remained firmly by the side of her hostess, who seated herself on an early English bench at the end of the terrace. But a few minutes later, Mrs. Davenant Hewetson, summoned to the telephone, hurried away, leaving Marica sitting alone on the white painted seat. Instantly a tall figure stepped out of the verandah and "the eighteenth century gallant" sat down beside her. Twining his arm along the back of the seat behind her, he proceeded to screw in his eye-glass and contemplate her profile in silence.

"I am wondering, dear lady," he said at last, in a lingering voice, "how one should describe you. Would you call yourself the restful type of woman, for

example?"

"I believe I am extremely restful when I am bored," she answered briefly.

But he was far too sure of his powers of attraction

to take the satire to himself.

"And you are bored here, dear lady?" he enquired sympathetically. "You do not find our worthy friends, the Hewetsons, entertaining, I fear?"

"I don't altogether admire their choice of guests," she said in the same chilling tone, but again the shaft

fell harmless to the ground.

"Ah!" he answered, allowing the eye-glass to fall from his eye and clink against the star sapphires that formed the buttons of his white waistcoat, as he described a précieux gesture of derision with his hand, "these good people are doubtless rococo, but what will you? It is very pleasant here for a space. The

chef is excellent, the wines passable; one may dally here right merrily for a night or two. The real world—the world to which you and I belong, dear lady!—is not so thoughtful for one's well-being."

"You are quite mistaken if you think I meant to criticize the Hewetsons—it would be execrable taste

after all their hospitality."

Lord Cressage smiled indulgently. "How quite too dear of you to say that. But surely you know, dear lady, that the right people are never hospitable?"

There was a certain horrid truth in this, the girl reflected. People in an assured position can treat their guests as they choose, yet still fill their houses. There was little hospitality on the Sheep Track! Yet how one longed for a breath of that rarefied and frozen atmosphere after the tropical intimacy of the one in which she found herself! At this moment she could have found it in her heart, almost, to love Mr. Courtney Vincent, with his chilly indifference to her attractions.

Gradually the arm behind her neck crept further along the back of the seat. She moved away—Lord Cressage shifted his position nearer. Her attention wandered from the sound of his droning voice to ponder some excuse for escaping from him. But, before she could formulate any plan of campaign, she became suddenly aware that he was making love to her.

On looking back, she could never remember exactly what he had said; only a confused recollection remained of heated dialogue, of amorous pleading and indignant rebuff. Yet his final words were indelibly printed on her memory.

"Yes, fair lady," he said, with a shrug of his padded shoulders, "I am at present, as you so naïvely express it, a married man. Still that is merely a matter of temporary inconvenience. Before long I

hope I may be able to make other arrangements!!"
This, Marica inferred, was his delicate way of alluding to the fact of which Nina had informed her.

that Lady Cressage had filed divorce proceedings

against him.

There was now no further need for tactics and rising abruptly from the seat, she began to walk rapidly towards the house, followed by Lord Cressage, his curled head bent towards her, his large face close to hers. Suddenly, before she could divine his intention, he seized her hand in his manicured fingers and kissed it. Yet though she wrenched it fiercely from his grasp, there was time to feel with loathing, the contact of his large loose lips and to catch the penetrating exotic odour that rose from his hair. Reaching the verandah, she made a dash for safety through the drawing-room windows. Mrs. Davenant Hewetson, sitting at the writing-table, looked up in surprise.

"I'm so sorry but I must go to bed—I have a sudden attack of neuralgia!" Marica hastily explained, selecting skilfully that most accommodating of diseases, from which a woman can recover as speedily

as she succumbs.

"Yes, dearie, I thought you didn't look strong, and I was afraid you might find it damp out in the garden. Let me get you some aspirin!" the kindly soul suggested.

"No, thank you!" Marica answered hastily, "the only thing I really want is a bath—a boiling bath,

thank you, dear Mrs. Hewetson!"

Yes, only total emersion in the clear green water of the pretty white-tiled bathroom, that opened out of her room, could restore her self-respect, and as she sank, ten minutes later, into its scented depths, she breathed a sigh of relief.

"Oh, for a cake of carbolic soap!" she murmured as she scrubbed the back of her left hand, that had received the kiss, until an angry red patch flared out

on its white surface.

Nothing, she resolved, should persuade her to endure a repetition of to-day's experiences; to-morrow she would devise some pretext for returning to London.

Eleven o'clock found her already preparing for

flight by packing-Léontine having gone to bedwhen a light tap sounded on the door and Nina

fluttered in.

"Darling, I'm so sorry, Mrs. Hewetson says you have neuralgia—not bad? That's a good thing! How charming you look in that kimono with your hair in a plait!" she went on disconnectedly, sitting down by the dressing-table and contemplating Marica affectionately. "I never knew a woman take to bits as well as you do! Other women may make more effect arriving at a party, but they'd look hags with their hair down. Now you're always lovely! The men here all rave about you, of course."

"I wish to Heaven they didn't!" Marica cried "I feel just now as if I never want vehemently.

anyone to admire me again as long as I live!"

"Marica, what is the matter?" and then for the first time catching sight of the open portmanteau, into which at this instant Marica hurled a pair of boots, she asked in surprise: "You're packing? But why, darling?"

"Because I'm going away to-morrow early . . ."

"But why, why?" Nina repeated, mystified.

"I can't bear another day of it, Nina. I'm sorry, for I know you meant to do me a good turn by asking me to come with you-"

"Tell me what's the matter!"

But when Marica recounted the evening's happenings, Nina only laughed, and the more heated her friend became in the telling, the more she shouted with mirth.

"Oh, Marica, what a glorious scene it must have been! Of course, you do Lord Cressage perfectly—I can hear it all!"

Marica shut her eyes with a groan. "How can you laugh, Nina?"

Seeing Marica was really annoyed, Nina's quick

sympathy was instantly aroused.

"Darling," she cried, putting her arms round her, "don't be so tragic! Believe me, men don't bear taking seriously!" A mocking gleam shone in the green eyes. "Do, do try," she went on, "to see how funny it all was." But again her voice shook with

suppressed laughter.

"You don't understand," Marica said coldly, as she turned away. This was just one of the moments when Nina jarred. She was so unfastidious. She had none of the sensitive woman's shrinking from being made love to by any but the one man who has the power to thrill her; indeed, she was constitutionally unable to snub either man or boy who entertained a harmless admiration for her. As long as they had no designs on her liberty, no intention to compromise her, they might sit at her side indefinitely, pouring out their hearts in amorous nothings. And if they grew impassioned, Nina was only amused.

"You don't understand!" Marica said again as she looked at the lovely laughing face wonderingly. "I can't endure indiscriminate flirtation. Flirtation ought to be a fine art, a skilful game of fencing, not a boxing match that leaves you hot and breathless."

"Oh, my dear, Englishmen seldom make good fencers. And they wouldn't be bothered to flirt artistically. But seriously, darling, you don't mean to

go to-morrow?"

"I couldn't bear three more days of it, Nina!"

"Then try to bear one. Mrs. Davenant Hewetson has taken the wildest fancy to you—you couldn't hurt her feelings by rushing off to-morrow. Come at any rate for one day's racing before you go. Promise—to please me, Marica!"

And in the end Marica promised.

CHAPTER VIII.

An immense motor omnibus and a roomy limousine waited at the door of Upminster Court to take the party to the racecourse the following morning. Davenant Hewetson, attired in Requir's latest creation of champagne charmeuse, surveyed the assembled guests with an approving eye. They would all do her credit, she felt complacently, the women represented the dernier cri of fashion, except Mrs. Darsie Marling, who clung to the limp black garmentswhich near relationship to a duke made permissible relieving them only by jet ornaments of more modern design than the tarnished gold jewellery she usually wore about her. Imogen and Gwladys, in the newest colour-scheme of purple and cerise, were also looking their best, and their pleasant peony faces radiated contentment. The men of the party, condemned by etiquette to morning coats and top hats, were necessarily more subdued in appearance, but here and there a gayer note was struck, for "Josh" had a white top hat carefully adjusted at a sporting angle on his polished head; Mr. Topping's white spats and patent leather boots, proclaimed him still the "nut," and General Blennerville, in defiance of fashion, displayed salmon-pink carnation in his buttonhole. Lord Cressage alone had dared to depart from the sombre black ordained by custom, for his long tight-fitting morning coat and nearly peg-top trousers, were of a deep marron shade. A low top hat with a curling brim, lavender kid gloves and a clouded cane, completed his attire.

Marica, steadily avoiding the glance she felt to be directed on her through the single gold eye-glass, retreated as far as possible into the background, and catching sight of Captain Chatburn, smiled at him

so charmingly that he sprang immediately towards her.

"Do tell me all about the horses that are going to run to-day!" she began eagerly. Captain Chatburn was really quite the most presentable looking man in the whole party, and it occurred to Marica that a pretended interest in the day's racing might bind him to her side, and that his presence would serve to keep the eighteenth century gallant at bay. For since the little scene of the night before, Lord Cressage's glances had become more than ever ardent. Marica was the only woman in the house who appeared to resent his attentions and in consequence he admired her more than ever.

Captain Chatburn, encouraged by Marica's sudden graciousness, asked no more than to become her sporting mentor, and chatting confidentially of "tips," piloted her gallantly towards the motor omnibus in which the younger members of the party were taking their places, whilst Mrs. Davenant Hewetson with Lady Belturbet, Mrs. Darsie Marling and General Blennerville, entered the *limousine* through the doorway of which, a moment later, Marica saw to her relief the *marron* coat tails also disappearing.

The five-mile drive to the racecourse was unlike anything Marica had ever before experienced. Imogen and Gwladys were in their gayest mood, which expressed itself in giggling flirtation with every man in turn. They rolled their eyes, whispered, tittered, nudged each other, held the young men's hands on the pretext of telling their fortunes, and stuck flowers into their buttonholes, yet when Nina accepted a cigarette offered her by Captain Chatburn, they looked at her in round-eyed horror. What a strange world it was, Marica thought, sitting in a paralysed silence and wondering how it would be possible ever to feel at one's ease with that portion of the nation's backbone which revels in vulgarity but dreads the unaccustomed.

On their arrival at the racecourse, "Josh" led the way to the two boxes reserved for the party from

Upminster Court. For another year or so, Mrs. Darsie Marling had informed Mrs. Davenant Hewetson, they must be content with boxes, but no doubt a few seasons hence would see them all safely arrived within the sacred precincts of the Royal Enclosure. Meanwhile she and her friends magnanimously renounced their right of entry and made their way, with the rest of the party, to the boxes.

Everyone was soon busily consulting race-cards and making bets, but Captain Chatburn, having been once more firmly appropriated by Imogen, Marica was obliged to accept the kind offices of "Josh," who, in spite of the appeal in Maisie Temperley's china blue eyes, constituted himself Marica's escort and insisted

on doing her betting for her.

"'Josh' is so splendid at a race-meeting!" Gwladys said admiringly, "he knows all the horses and most of the people too—he'll tell you all about everything!"

"Josh" smiled affectionately at his sister; he was an excellent brother; no wonder Imogen and Gwladys adored him! Here again a member of this family gave evidence of a virtue not usually to be met with in society, "Josh" showed none of the selfish aloofness that characterised Captain Morecambe and the brothers of the other girls Marica had known; he identified himself entirely with his family, and was never happier than when giving his sisters the benefit of his experience and knowledge of the world. He often took his mother to the play and patiently explained all the topical allusions and double ententes.

"Sit here, Miss Fayne," he said, genially, leading her to a chair at the front of the box, "you'll get a splendid view of the course. The second race is just

beginning. Have you got anything on it?"

No, Marica had not thought of betting, but as a way of getting through the day it would be worth

trying.

"Please put this on 'Hooligan Girl' for me!" she said, holding out a sovereign and choosing the first name that caught her eye on the race-card.

Everyone seemed amused at the suggestion.

"'Hooligan Girl'? But she's quite an outsider!"

"Have you had a stable tip, Miss Fayne?"

"' 'Hooligan Girl's' not in the running!"

"Why not 'Pink Tonic'?" "Josh" suggested kindly.

"Oh, very well, 'Pink Tonic' then!" she agreed. But when 'Pink Tonic' fell behind in the first half mile and 'Hooligan Girl' won by two lengths, everyone was convinced that Marica must have mysterious sources of information and pressed her to impart them.

It was rather amusing to be regarded as a sporting prophet, so she smiled enigmatically and accepted the

rôle assigned to her.

"What do you fancy for the next race, Miss

Fayne?" "Josh" inquired with interest.

"Oh, 'Midinette'—without a doubt!" she answered firmly. If one played the part of prophetess there was nothing to be gained by vacillation.

"And 'Boomerang' for a place?"
"No, 'Malingerer,'" she answered, though she did not in the least understand the meaning of the question.

And though "Boomerang" failed dismally,

"Malingerer" came in an easy second.

After that her fame as an oracle was established. Becoming more reckless, she put larger sums each time on to the horse whose name on the race-card first attracted her attention, and though her shots were once or twice wide of the mark, by the end of the afternoon she had spotted no less than three winners, whilst two other horses she had backed were placed. She smiled as "Josh" brought her back handfuls of sovereigns from the bookmakers, though her "money sense" was too undeveloped for her to find the joy in the possession that filled Mrs. Temperley. For Maisie, regarding Marica as a mascotte, had followed her lead blindly and was making a small fortune.

"Darling!" she cried, clasping Marica's hand, "I've never had such a day! We must really go

racing again together!"

She was ready even to forgive "Josh's" defection, which after all might only prove temporary. All day he hardly left Marica's side for a moment. At the gorgeous luncheon, provided for the guests by their thoughtful hostess, "Josh" hovered round incessantly attending to her wants, pressing food and drink upon her. And afterwards, in the intervals of the races, he walked about with her in the paddock and pointed out celebrities to her attention.

"See that fellow over there, Miss Fayne? That's Mirvale, the tenor. Dreadful looking fellows those musical chaps, aren't they? Ah, the Duchess of Bingthorpe," he went on indicating Mrs. Darset who passed them at a little distance, "charming, isn't she?—but getting a bit passée now, of course! Why, there's Varnham, the flying man, putting on

flesh, isn't he?"

"Doesn't that happen to be Sir Charles Frimley?"

Marica mildly suggested.

"Why, so it is! 'Pon my word, how Frimley's changed lately. Married the Californian heiress, didn't he? By the way, have you heard that last story about her?" and his voice sank confidentially.

Marica spent a highly diverting quarter of an hour listening to anecdotes about people in society, some of whom she had met herself and so was able to appreciate the fertility of the imaginations that endowed them with strange and lurid traits she had never dreamt that they possessed.

As they walked through the paddock towards the end of the afternoon, on their way back to their seats,

they were joined by Lord Cressage.

"Ah, dear lady," he remarked, turning to walk by Marica's side with his clouded cane held carelessly across his back, "I suppose you are solemnly trekking boxwards—" and then, taking advantage of "Josh" pausing to greet a friend, he added confidentially:

"what is there to prevent us—you and I—from taking a stroll in the Enclosure?"

"In what Enclosure?" she asked vaguely.

He looked at her in surprise: "But the Royal Enclosure of course!" he said, nodding his head in the direction of a white paling that enclosed a lawn on which a crowd of black-coated man and smart women were collected. "Surely you, dear lady, have the entrée?"

She shook her head. "Oh, no, I'm quite outside the pale!" she answered, hoping that the information might serve to cool his admiration for her, "but is that really the Royal Enclosure?" she added, looking with interest at the fold in which the followers of the Sheep Track were herded. She had often heard of it as the goal of social aspirants and she smiled now as she recognised familiar faces—Mr. Erdington, forestalling Paradise by talking to two duchesses at once-she recognised them from their photographs in the papers; Lady Frimley, late Sadie B. Funk, shrilly entertaining an appreciative group; Mrs. Malines, sinking earthwards as she grasped a royal hand extended to her; and Marica reflected how strange was the turn in the wheel of Fate that had replaced the counter which once separated her from Bessie Bosham by the hurdle of the Royal Sheep Fold. As she walked on past the lower end of the lawn she became aware that only a few feet away, Lady Grundisburgh was contemplating her coldly through her lorgnettes, she felt rather than saw Anne's evebrows raised in surprise, and further on the piercing hawk-like glance of Mrs. Draycott transfixed her. Was it fancy or did she really hear Birdie remark in languid tones:

"Oh, Mother, there is Marica Fayne walking with

two quite appalling men!"

Yes, they were appalling, who knew it better than herself? Glancing up quickly at each of her companions in turn, it seemed to her that they had never looked so terrible as at that moment—" Josh" with his top-hat tipped jauntily, his field-glasses strung

across his shoulders, his plump white face expressing the perfect peacefulness of a pig who has lately dined; the eighteenth century gallant on her other side bending his head adorned with those atrocious curls towards her and murmuring bon mots, accomby meaning oeuillades through his gold eye-glass, into her ear. What must the Sheep Track think of them? But why did she care? "Am I after all a snob?" she asked herself with a sinking heart. Yet she knew that she could have walked serenely past those derisive eyes with almost any other type of humanity, with men in flannel shirts and elastic-sided boots, in clawhammers and check trousers, with flowing hair and velveteen coats, in fustian or in rags. It was the awful smartness, the blatant prosperity of "Josh" and Lord Cressage, that filled her with despair.

"Josh," once more intent on spotting celebrities, was chatting pleasantly about the passers-by, when suddenly an exclamation on his part made Marica's heart bound.

"Ah, here's Windlesham coming along-uncom-

monly good-looking fellow, isn't he?"
Yes, this time "Josh" was right—it was Tim coming towards them, Captain Harding at his side as before. And as she recognised him, the blue eyes lit up and he came forward hurriedly and held out his hand.

"Ah, it's you at last!" he said with a smile, disregarding her companions, who with a look of surprise at the encounter, strolled away to a discreet distance, whilst Captain Harding took up a waiting position a few paces off.

"Have you forgotten all about me?" Tim went

on in an eager undertone.

"No!" she answered. She was so glad to see him that that was all she could say. She wished that tiresome pulse somewhere in her throat would stop beating.

"And you are still Mrs. Maxwell, I suppose?"

She smiled. "Yes, I think we'll leave it at that, please!" For the present she felt it would be better to remain a mystery.

"Will you come and have tea with me in the tent

over there?"

Would she? Ah, with what thankfulness she would have escaped with anyone from the party from Upminster Court—and with Tim!

"Yes," she answered, and again that throbbing

pulse made further words impossible.

"Then I'll tell Harding," he said eagerly, "he's pawing the ground over there—by the way, may I re-introduce him? He hasn't seen you without a mask, you know!"

Captain Harding's brown eyes were full of puzzled enquiry as he came forward and bowed in response

to the introduction.

"Surely," he began, "we've met before-somewhere-"

"Yes, at Mrs. Sherwood's!"
"Ah, of course!" he said stiffly.

It was evident that he did not connect her with Covent Garden, and she decided not to enlighten him further. But at this moment "Josh," who had waited on, evidently hoping to be introduced to Lord Windlesham, saw his opportunity and came forward.

"Ah, Captain Harding!" he exclaimed genially, "I see you've forgotten me, but I believe we met a

year or two ago at manoeuvres!"

"Really? I don't remember!" Harding answered

coldly.

But "Josh," nothing daunted, went on chattily; "Hewetson's my name, Davenant Hewetson—and this charming lady," he added, turning to Marica, "is staying with us for the race-week!"

"Ah, indeed?"

If this fearful person was really Mrs. Maxwell's escort, one could not ignore him, and both men stood silent whilst "Josh" continued to dilate on Marica's attractions.

"Miss Fayne has really the most amazing flair for spotting winners—ha! ha! So besides being such a piquante addition to a house-party—"

"Miss Fayne, did you say?" Harding asked

blankly.

"Yes, this charming lady-Miss Fayne!"

"Of course, of course!" Lord Windlesham interposed hastily, "but now, Mr.—ah! Mr.——"

"Davenant Hewetson."

"Mr. Davenant Hewetson, will you forgive me if I deprive you of Miss Fayne for a little while? She has promised to come to tea with me over there!"

And before Marica could realise how it had happened, she found herself being led across the course to the tea-tents by Tim, whilst "Josh" and Captain Harding disappeared amongst the crowd in opposite directions.

"I must talk to you alone," Lord Windlesham said earnestly, as they sat down at a tea-table in a quiet corner of the tent. "I simply couldn't let you slip away from me to-day without an idea how we were to meet again. But at any rate, I know your real name now, don't I?"

"Yes, my name is Fayne—Marica Fayne," she admitted. After all that would tell him nothing; the Westshire Faynes had made no noise in the world.

"And you're not married?" he asked smiling.

She shook her head. "Did you really believe I was?"

"No!" And then with a sudden boyish laugh he added: "But when I saw the fellow with the whiskers—nutmeg whiskers, you know—"

She broke into a peal of laughter. Yes, it was true, the short side whiskers of the eighteenth century gallant were a sort of awful nutmeg colour!

"You thought he was my husband? I see—Oh, but how too funny—and how awful too!" she added with a shudder.

"And so he's not 'Mr. Maxwell'?"

"No, he's Lord Cressage."

"Cressage? Ah! I've never met him," he said shortly.

"Then you're fortunate."

She stopped abruptly. A sudden longing to confide in the new-found friend came over her; it would be such a relief to tell him all she had been feeling, to tell him that whatever he thought of "Josh" and Lord Cressage, he could not mind them half as much as she did. What must he think of her choice of intimes? For of course, from "Josh's" almost proprietary manner, one would naturally conclude he was one of her oldest and dearest friends. She longed to explain to him that only three days ago she had never set eyes on Josh, that every fibre of her being writhed at his fearful familiarity, that for the blessed moment—now only two days hence—that would bring release, she hoped never, as long as she lived, to see him again.

And then the memory of all "Josh's" kindness throughout the course of the day came back to her, she thought of the gorgeous luncheon he had pressed upon her, the Pêches Alexandra, Coupe Jacques, and Moselle cup he had handed to her with his own fat hands, full of concern because she ate so little. Could she, with the flavour of his hospitality still lingering about her palate and the sovereigns he had retrieved for her from the bookmakers, weighing down her gold purse, suddenly arise and disown him, break this silence by remarking: "I hope you don't think that dreadful person, who introduced himself, is a friend of mine—'' No, no, she could not say it, could not be so contemptible a snob! And pride, too, sealed her lips. Why apologise for one's associates? Tim must believe what he liked! And so she held her little chin higher and hastily changed the subject.

"Is Captain Harding a great friend of yours?" she

asked irrelevantly.

"Yes, dear old Tinker—he's always called that, you know—is the best pal I have in the world."

"And you go everywhere together?"

"Nearly everywhere—I want you to get to know him, too," he added.

"Do you think we should get on?"

"Yes, don't you?"
I don't know."

Why was it that somehow she felt sure they would not? At Mrs. Sherwood's, she remembered, he was the one man she had not felt to be congenial and today as they met, she realised instantly that the derisive glances she had encountered from the lawn of the Royal Sheep Fold were repeated in Captain Harding's hard brown eyes. And directly Tim introduced him, she had felt again the sensation that overcame her at Covent Garden, the conviction that this friend of Tim's disliked, distrusted her.

"Don't let's talk about Tinker now," Tim said hastily, "there are so many other things I want to say to you. To begin with, won't you tell me where you

live?"

She hesitated. Would her address give any clue to her identity, help him to discover that she was not the mysterious Bohemian he doubtless imagined her to be, but just an ordinary girl, like those who bored him at parties and on whose account he fled society? But after all, Blenheim Gardens was undistinctive—anybody might live there, and so in the end she told him.

He poked the grass at his feet with his stick and said nothing for a moment, then he raised his head and

looked deep into her eyes.

"When may I come and see you?" he asked in a low voice.

She turned her head away.

"I don't know-"

"May I come to-morrow?"

"I may not be back in London-"

"But I've got to go away the day after—say you will—"

"Ah! at last! Here is the fair Marica!" a sonorous voice suddenly exclaimed close beside her, and Marica and Tim looked up in startled surprise to see Lord Cressage standing before them, one arm akimbo, whilst with the other hand he screwed in his gold eye-glass and continued imperturbably: "Our worthy host, dear lady, is at this moment collecting his guests with a view to trekking, so if this pleasant tête-à-tête is at an end—"

Marica stood bolt upright, her eyes flashing, "May I ask, since when I am Marica to you?" she asked

freezingly.

Lord Cressage's large mouth widened into a bland smile. "Tut, tut! fairest of ladies, whence this heat? I crave a thousand pardons!" He turned to Lord Windlesham, including him in the smile, and with a précieux shrug of the shoulders, he added lightly: "Charming, of course. But like all charming women—petulant! What will you?"

Tim's only answer was a stony glare, which was however not without effect on Lord Cressage's assurance, for with another shrug, he moved away in the direction of the party from Upminster Court, who might be seen approaching through the crowd.

"Let me take you back to your friends," Tim said

gently.

"Oh, no—it doesn't matter. I see them over there!" Marica answered hastily, holding out her hand in the wild hope of saying "Good-bye" to Tim and leaving him before he too, became aware of them. But Mrs. Davenant Hewetson was too quick for her, the next moment she had borne down upon her, in all her plumed and jewelled bravery, and was calling out in kindly accents:

"Well, dearie, we must be getting home. Are you

ready?"

"Yes, quite ready." She turned with a crimson face to Tim. "Good-bye."

"And what about to-morrow?" he asked quickly. "I don't know—perhaps!" she answered, and as

"I don't know-perhaps!" she answered, and as she hurried away to join her hostess, she wondered whether she had heard him murmur: "I shall come then—on the chance."

Her mind was made up now. At all costs she must get away. She *could* not face another day's racing with Lord Cressage and "Josh" on each side of her, or another evening eluding their attentions in the garden of Upminster Court! Some excuse for an immediate departure must be ready on her return to that hospitable roof. But what? What? All the way back in the motor omnibus she sat in silence—deaf to the playful sallies, the romping badinage that raged now more fiercely than ever between the Davenant Hewetson girls and their admirers—thinking only of a plan for escape. Then suddenly she remembered Léontine—Léontine with the ready wit of her race would be sure to think of a way! Directly the motor drew up before the door, she sprang out, hurried up to her room and rang the bell.

Léontine appeared smiling.

"Léontine, I want to get away from here—to go back to London."

"Ha!" Léontine's eyes were lit with an alert intelligence. "Mademoiselle is not amused!"

"No, I am not amused."

Léontine nodded sagaciously. "C'est vrai—c'est ici tout ce qu'il y a de plus 'rasta'! Well, Mademoiselle has but to receive a telephone message summoning her to the bedside of a suffering aunt."

"And who is to send it?"

"But Adolphe, Mademoiselle! Nothing of more simple. I have but to call him up on the pantry telephone—Monsieur Beauclerc, the butler, will permit me anything—and give Adolphe, in French, the necessary instructions. Immediately it will be fait accompli."

The plan certainly seemed simplicity itself, and Léontine, having successfully carried out her share of the plot, proceeded to pack Marica's things, whilst Marica herself peacefully descended to the lawn,

where the house-party were assembled round a late tea—to await events. Twenty minutes later a telephone message was duly presented to her by Beauclerc.

She started to her feet with well-feigned surprise. "I must go home immediately—my aunt is ill."

A chorus of sympathetic condolence and enquiry broke out immediately. Was her aunt very old? Was she subject to these sudden attacks? Must Miss Fayne really hurry to her bedside immediately? Yes, it was absolutely necessary, Marica insisted, avoiding the mocking gleam in Nina's green eyes and parrying every question with a skill that surprised herself.

But when her kind hostess, hospitable to the last, embraced her heartily on both cheeks at parting and watched her into the limousine which she insisted—in spite of all Marica's protesting—should take her to the station, the girl leant back against the gorgeously cushioned back of the car and groaned with shame

and remorse.

It was late when she reached home, and rushing into the library, where her father sat at work, she threw her arms round his neck for the first time in her life. She had never really appreciated him before, she told herself—this strange high-souled being so aloof from the tawdry world in which she had spent the last two awful days.

"My love!" he said, looking up in alarm, "what

is the matter?"

"Only that I'm so glad to be home again!"

A wintry smile crossed his features.

"Indeed? And pray may I ask why?"

She closed her eyes with a groan. "It's been awful!"

"Ah, dear child," he answered, with a sigh, "if

you seek pleasure-!"

Again the chill of his intellectuality froze her. She turned away with tears in her eyes and went up to bed.

CHAPTER IX.

Marica awoke next morning to the sound of triumphant marches playing in her brain. What glorious thing was the day to bring forth? And then she remembered—this afternoon Tim was coming to see her! Henceforth he was to be no longer an elusive possibility, crossing her path only at uncertain and all too rare intervals, but a part of her life, a friend who had found his way to her doorstep and who might be expected to find it often again. But as the day wore on the acidulous voice that belonged to one of the members of that "boarding-house of personalities," which was Marica, made itself heard. that was the reason why you rushed back to London!" it said spitefully. "You persuaded yourself it was to get away from "Josh" and Lord Cressage, but you know that really it was that you wanted to see Tim!

"And if it was, why not?" the voice of youth retorted mutinously.

"Woman the Pursuer!" jeered the acidulous

one.

Ah, no, no! she could not play that part!—forfeit her own self-respect by manoeuvring! And then, as the hour approached at which he might be expected to arrive, the acidulous voice suggested a fresh possibility.

"Supposing that after all he does not come?"

Ah! what then? She would never hold up her head again! To have hurried home to see a man, who might have changed his mind about coming! For to find that she was not only the *intime* of "Josh," but also "the fair Marica" of the eighteenth century gallant, the "dearie" of the blatant Mrs. Hewetson, might surely prove enough to damp his ardour! Yes,

in all probability he would not come! And suddenly she felt she could not risk the possibility of his failing to appear—could not sit at home, a patient Mariana, waiting for the ringing of the door-bell she flew upstairs, put on her hat and hurried to Queen's Gate—she would have tea with the aunts and wait there till all possibility of his calling was over.

At six o'clock she returned, wretched, but trium-

phant, to Blenheim Gardens.

"A gentleman called at five o'clock, mum," Denman remarked in his usual grumbling voice, as he opened the door.

"Ah! Did he give his name?"

"He left his card, mum," and Denman jerked his

head in the direction of the hall-table.

There it was—a card with "The Earl of Windlesham" on it, and at the top, in pencil, the words: "Very disappointed."

What a fool she had been to listen to the croakings of the acidulous voice! Of course Tim had understood! She might have known it! And it was perfectly horrid of her to disappoint him.

Denman was just moving rheumatically away, when

an unwonted communicativeness overcame him.

"The gentleman,"—Denman had evidently not bothered to read the name on the card—"seemed uncommon taken with the dawg." There was a humorous gleam in his dull old eye at the recollection.

At this moment Léontine, who had been hovering on the landing in a state of acute agitation, came

hurriedly downstairs.

"Oh, Mademoiselle!" she cried, "the monsieur who called to-day was enchanted with Balzac! "Quel monsieur charmant!" she added rapturously.

"You would think anyone charming who admired Balzac, Léontine! What did the monsieur say?"

"First of all, that he was very sad that Mademoiselle was out. Il était navré! And then he asked when he would find her at home. I say, 'Ma foi, I do not

know.' It was then that he appeared to notice Balzac."

Léontine paused, and a gamine look of comprehension came into her face.

"Go on, Léontine, what then?"

"'Balzac,' he says then, 'doubtless promènes himself at times in the Park?' 'But, certainly,' I reply, 'nearly every morning Mademoiselle conducts him to the Kensington Gardens.' And as he goes away he says in the most polite way: 'I hope then, to have the pleasure to meet Balzac en promenade!'"

And Léontine's mouth widened into a delighted grin.

"Léontine," Marica said severely, "I forbid you to discuss Balzac's plans with callers!"

Léontine cast her eyes down demurely. "Je demande mille pardons, mais le monsieur était si charmant!"

For several mornings after that, Marica resolutely avoided Kensington Gardens. She would not fall into the trap laid for her by Léontine. If this unconventional friendship was to continue, Tim must "make the running." And then suddenly, a few days later, she came face to face with him. She was passing the Albert Memorial on her way to the Serpentine, with Balzac, when they met. He came quickly towards her and held out his hand.

"At last!" he said eagerly, "why have you been

so unkind?"

She raised her eyebrows with a smile.

"Out on Friday when I came!" he continued, turning to walk beside her, "and since then I've been every morning to Kensington Gardens!"

"I thought you were going away."
"I changed my mind about going."

"I see."

They walked on a little way in silence.

It was a lovely summer morning and under the trees rosy-cheeked babies, in the freshest of cotton frocks, were playing. Tim looked at them affectionately.

"Aren't they ripping? I love kids, don't you?" he asked impulsively.

"Yes-I think so-I've really never known any well. But I know I love animals."

"Oh, of course, how could one help that?"

"Especially monkeys!"

"You're talking of Susan? How odd your remembering that!"

"One doesn't see a young man in a smart morning coat clasping a chimpanzee in his arms every day of one's life!" she said with a little ripple of laughter at the recollection.

But he evidently did not consider it unusual.

"Susan is a great friend of mine," he said simply. "I shouldn't feel like that to any chimpanzee. But, as a matter of fact," he went on, "I'm really fonder of birds than monkeys. I should love to show you mine."

"Do you keep many of them?"

"Oh, yes, any amount. They're such jolly little beggars, you know-sit in tight rows on their perches to keep each other warm and when the middle ones get hot, they move out to give the end ones a chance."

"How altruistic of them!"

"They're splendid—especially Tommy! You must come one day and see them. Do you know the Secretary Bird at the Zoo, by the way?"
"No, I don't think I do."

"It's a lovely thing with enormously long eyelashes and its particular form of greeting is to kick you hard in the back."

"Do you often give it the chance?"

"Oh, well, one feels it has so few pleasures!"

And then she told him about Sammy, the ring-tailed coati, who had scented his tail with trèfle. Tim smiled happily at the description.

"We must go together one day and take him some By the way, which part of the Park are we making for?"

"I'm making for the Serpentine. I promised to throw sticks for Balzac."

"Balzac doesn't look like a water dog."

"He isn't really—he's supposed to be a Bhutia terrier, but we think his grandmother's aunt, or something of the kind, must have been a spaniel, for at moments he loves the water. To-day he's dying for

a plunge!"

They spent a golden hour by the Serpentine. Tim was not the least lover-like now, as he had seemed at the ball, but just a charming playmate, throwing sticks for Balzac and talking nonsense to him in the earnest voice which invariably wins a dog's

respect.

She wondered what it was that made him so different from all the other men she had met. Many of them had been 'cheery,' but none had had his sparkling joie de vivre combined with the serenity of a summer sea. Their gaiety had been rather of the roystering order and round them all had clung an atmosphere of dissipation. They were the outcome of their age—an age that cannot rest, but seeks perpetual stimulus in excitement. But Tim had evidently no need to seek distraction. He was as simple as a child in his love of outdoor things and in his affinity with all living creatures-human or otherwise. Two ragged children who stood wide-eyed watching Balzac's performances in the water, went away dumb but overjoyed with pennies filling up their pockets. And the prosperous babies in perambulators, to whom he clucked in passing, stretched out plump arms towards him and crowed with delight.

"What are you doing to-morrow?" he asked sud-

denly, as they walked home together.

"To-morrow—Sunday? Oh, nothing in particular." And Tim smiled but said no more about it until they parted at the door of Blenheim Gardens.

"Good-bye then till to-morrow!" he remarked as

they shook hands.

"What about to-morrow?" she asked with a smile.

But he only laughed and walked away down the street.

The next morning was glorious. A quivering heat lay over London, veiling the ends of the streets in a dim blue haze. The smell of baking asphalt was wafted through the windows of the dining-room where Marica, in a cool white gown, sat sipping a belated cup of coffee. For the hundredth time she thought sighingly of the happy people spending their summer in the country instead of following the absurd custom of herding into towns till August. How heavenly to be able to lie out on the grass this perfect June day, and stare up at the blue sky above one!

Suddenly the door-bell rang. Professor Duchêne probably, whom Papa was expecting in the study, whither he had already repaired to spend the morning pouring over a newly-discovered papyrus. A man's voice in the hall, and Denman answering . . . but did the voice of any professor ever ring so joyously? She sprang to her feet-the door opened, and Tim came in, wearing a more than usually "morning face"

and a long light motor coat.
"Well," he said as he took her hand, "I've come to fetch you."

"What for?"

"To spend a long day in the country. I've got my car outside. You'll come, won't you?"

"I should love it—oh! how I should love it!" she

cried longingly.

"Well, then you'll come? D'you know," he went on eagerly, "I made the plan yesterday, but I didn't tell you for fear you might say 'No.' But now I'm here you can't refuse and disappoint me!"
"I don't want to but—I must tell Papa."

"Oh, I see-you live with your father?"

"Yes. Who did you think I lived with?"
"I don't know—I don't believe I'd thought about it!" he said with a laugh.

"All the same, I should rather like you to meet Papa."

It had suddenly struck her that it would be nice to show him that her own menkind were not of the order of "Josh" and Lord Cressage.
"You're very fond of him?" Lord Windlesham

asked sympathetically.

"Yes," she said rather blankly. Yet how could one be exactly "fond" of such an abstraction as Papa? She was proud of him—he was so apart from all the materialism and the mesquineries of humanity. "I admire him very much," she added, noticing

the surprised look on Tim's face. "He's so curious so unlike other people. But you shall see him for

yourself!"

And she hurried from the room and opened the

door of Mr. Fayne's library.

He was too engrossed in the deciphering of his manuscript to notice her entrance.

"Papa!" she said gently. He did not look up.

"Papa!" a little louder.

Still no answer.

She went up ond put her hand gently on his shoulder. He looked up now with a bewildered expression in his eves.

"What is it, my love?"

His mind was evidently still centuries away.

"Papa, could you attend one moment to something

I want to ask you?"

He sighed deeply. "I am so extremely busy this morning, Marica! As you came in I was in the very act of solving a point of great difficulty, and now you have completely broken the sequence of my thoughts!"

"I'm so sorry, but I didn't like to go out without telling you. I'm going down to the country in a

motor with a man I know!"

"A man? What man?" asked Mr. Fayne dreamily.

"His name is Lord Windlesham."

"Lord Windlesham? Windlesham? The name seems familiar! Ah, yes, I remember, his mother was a great friend of Caroline Grundisburgh's in the old days. And Caroline knows this young man very well—she often talked of him, yes, I remember," his eyes were wandering back to his papyrus.

"One moment, Papa. May I bring him in and

introduce him?"

"My love!" Despair settled on his features. "I am really, as I told you, so extremely busy and Professor Duchêne may arrive at any moment—ah! here he is!" For the door had opened and Denman was admitting a small middle-aged man with his hair en brosse and black-rimmed spectacles striding across his nose.

"Bonjour, monsieur le professeur!"
"Bonjour, monsieur Fayne!" He put the heels of his elastic-sided boots together and bowed deeply

as Mr. Fayne introduced Marica.

"Charmé de faire votre connaissance. J'ai connu votre illustre père---' and he embarked on an eloquent panegyric of Mr. Fayne's attainments. Marica murmured some suitable reply and slipped out of the room. Already the grey head and the bristling black one were bent over the papyrus.

"I can't introduce you—Papa is busy with a professor!" she said to Lord Windlesham.

"But you're coming with me?"

"Yes, I'm coming!"

She ran gaily upstairs to put on her hat.

It was delicious driving through the quiet Sunday streets with the summer air blowing gently in one's face. Tim was a perfect driver-no needless haste such as urged Pat Kilmurry or Reggie Beaumont to make of a motor run a series of hairbreadth escapes from accidents; no frenzied scuttlings from before the front wheels of the car by startled people or straying dogs; no sudden jammings on of brakes to avoid collisions. He drove, as he did everything else, with Buddhic calm and only smiled at the deliberate attempts of pedestrians to get run over.

"Aren't they maddening?" cried Marica, as an old woman, crossing the road with a jug of beer, carefully slowed down and crawled past the front of the motor with a leer over her shoulder, as if to say: 'You daren't run over me!'

"Poor old thing! If one's only happiness in life consisted in going to a pub, wouldn't one feel like making oneself as disagreeable as one could?"

All the way through lanes and villages he had a kindly word for everyone—a cheery 'Thank you, sir!' to the old farmer who held his dog away from the wheels of the car, a shout of greeting to the children who sat on a gate waving at the motor; even the stone-deaf milkman, whose cart impeded his progress for a quarter of a mile, failed to disturb his perfect serenity.

How splendid it must be to feel like that! the girl at his side thought enviously; the things, which fret and jar the nerves of most human beings, seemed

powerless to ruffle him.

As they went along, he talked to her about his life and she understood how he came to be so at peace with all the world. He told her about his home in Midshire and all the things he loved there—his dogs and horses, the village people of whom he made his friends, his old nurse who lived at one of the lodges and kept bantams, the rose-garden that his mother loved—and then he suddenly became silent, and she realised that here his feelings lay too deep for words. Tim evidently adored his mother! But after a while he began to talk of Jimmy, the small boy Marica had seen him with at Lord's. He was Tim's nephew, the son of his sister Claire—Lady Wavertree—and he came during his holidays to stay with his grandmother at Merewater.

"Jimmy and I go fishing together and play cricket

on the lawn!" he explained with a laugh.

"You're very fond of Jimmy?"

"Oh, of course!"

She felt sure that he adored all his relations!

"How peaceful to be able to like all one's family so much!" she said with a smile that was half a sigh. But it evidently did not occur to him that it would be possible to do otherwise, and she understood why he had looked surprised when she had not told him this morning that she adored her father.

"Where are we going to lunch?" she asked after a time, as the hands of a village clock pointed to one

o'clock.

"Are you getting hungry?"
I think I am. Aren't you?"

"Yes, though I hadn't realised it. We'll stop at the nearest inn. Ah! what about this?" he added brightly, as he put on the brake and nodded towards a cottage garden where the word "Refreshments" was impaled to a pear-tree.

"Splendid!" she agreed.

The car was stopped at the little white gate of the

garden.

"I'll go in and see what they can do for us," Tim said, getting out and walking up the red-flagged pathway to the door of the cottage.

A moment later he returned triumphant.

"We can have eggs and bacon and ginger-beer and cheese and marmalade. And we may have it in the garden if we don't disturb the turkey hen who's

sitting. That'll be perfect, won't it?"

Certainly nothing could be more delightful. A dear old woman, smiling and apple-cheeked, led the way through a red-tiled kitchen, with a big chimney corner, to a tiny patch of garden full of old-fashioned flowers—pinks and Canterbury bells and sweet-williams that filled the air with a hot fragrance. A clean, coarse table-cloth was laid on a trestle table and a big black cat came and jumped on to Tim's knee and insisted on remaining there all through the meal.

The food, of the most primitive description, was nevertheless excellent. Had eggs and bacon ever tasted so delicious? Marica wondered. These had a flavour that far surpassed any of Adolphe's subtlest

confections. She smiled as she thought of the other Sundays she had spent in the country—how different they had been! Pat Kilmurry, Winky, or another of Nina's circle had suggested a day on the river or a long motor run; they had made up a party, lunched at smart inns, the habitual rendezvous of motorists, at golf-club houses, at the "Riverbank" club, after the fashion dear to the Cockney heart, with waiters handing them French dishes, bands playing Gaiety tunes, and violent scents from Paris drowning the fragrance of the summer air. They were people to whom crowds were always necessary-moving throngs to watch and comment on. And the girl who had once, long years ago, on the castle wall of St. Jean du Loup, craved for people," realised again the weariness that the granting of her wish had brought her. She wanted nothing now but this peaceful cottage garden with its sunbaked flowers and droning bees, and the glimpse of distant woodland that glimmered between the branches of the fruit trees. Yet what would it all be without Tim? For not only Tim was the most charming of companions, but somehow he seemed to possess the faculty for bringing about a condition of things that was charming too.

"Tell me what you are thinking about," he asked gaily, breaking the silence that had fallen on them.

"I was thinking," she said with a smile, "that after all Kant was right, and the world is perhaps the projection of each man's brain." And seeing his bewildered expression, she went on lightly: "I mean that somehow the world seems quite a different place according to the people you are with. Some people make it seem gay, others make it sad—"
"And I?" he asked, grasping at the personal note

instantly, "How do I make it feel to you?"

Could she answer as she felt: "You make it seem a fairy land—all one's dreams of a perfect world come true?",

But she only said: "You make it seem happy. To-day I feel everyone is really happy. The dear old woman, with the apple-cheeks, and the black cat, purring so peacefully on your knee, and the bees, humming little songs as they dart in and out of the flowers. I don't believe there's anything sad or ugly in the world at this moment—only people have imagined it—or else perhaps it's the other way round and you've imagined the old woman and the cat and the bees, and all this "—she indicated the sunny garden, with a little wave of the hand. "I'm sure I should never have discovered them with anyone else."

He smiled peacefully, yet she realised that he had not quite understood her, perhaps because he was too accustomed to being happy to understand that one

could ever be anything else.

"I think people try too hard to be happy," he said, "they wear themselves out over it, instead of enjoying each moment as it comes. They are always saying, 'I shall be happy,' or 'I was happy,' instead of saying, 'I am happy—now.' That's what I feel we ought to do—just take the present moment and hug it!"

Yes, that was the secret of happiness, to live in the present moment as children do, taking no thought for the morrow, forgetting yesterday. This was how Tim lived—quite simply, like a child, serenely oblivious to problems of all kinds. Yet his mental repose was not of the sluggish order, like Sir Charles Frimley's, for he was vividly alive to all the beauty of the world around him. But metaphysics bored him; he did not want to know why he was alive or how long he would continue to enjoy a conscious existence. It was enough for him that he was in this world and that he found it a very pleasant place in which to be. And Marica, looking again at his "morning face" across the table, determined, with the adaptability of woman, to throw problems to the winds and look on life as he did-a matter to be enjoyed, not analysed.

The old woman with the apple-cheeks fell completely under the spell of Tim's personality, and

when she had cleared away the luncheon, insisted on showing him all her treasures—a photograph of her wedding group, a wool-work picture of the Ascension done by a devout grandmother, a stuffed canary whose death she still mourned inconsolably. And Tim was full of sympathy, admiring the wedding party, gazing at the woollen faces of the apostles with perfect seriousness, and condoling on the demise of the canary. She had always been an anti-motorist she told Tim, with a shake of her head, but now she came to the gate and looked at the long grey car with a kindly eye, as Tim and Marica got into it and drove away down the lane.

"Let's go and sit on the grass under those trees," Tim said later, nodding towards a clump of beech trees that grew on the side of a hill. "We can read

aloud to each other."

"Have you brought a book?"

"Yes, 'The Idylls of the King'—I always take them everywhere with me. Do you love them too?" he asked eagerly.

"I don't know-I'm sure I shall to-day!" she said

with a smile.

Yes, it was a day for Tennyson, she felt, as they sat down in the shade of the giant beech trees, overlooking the country side. Far away the distant woodlands lay veiled in the blue haze of summer, and around them the long grass, lush and brilliant, as only northern grass can be, rippled in the breeze. The copse close by was a riot of beauty—sunlight flickering through young beech leaves on to the clumps of pink and white campions and tall foxgloves, that made rosy splashes amongst the bracken. Up above, in the branches of the trees, wood pigeons crooned sleepily and young birds bickered over their findings, whilst now and again their shrill clamour was drowned by the scream of a startled pheasant, as it flew noisily through the undergrowth. Ah, yes, it was a day for Tennyson, not for Browning, a day to cast problems aside, as Tim said, to 'hug the present moment' in all its beauty. Here was life as God meant one to live it, serene and effortless. Men and women were meant to meet like this, to sit together under the blue sky, peacefully and in silence, not to chatter ceaselessly in crowded drawing-rooms. She was filled suddenly with a passionate pity for the people over there in the great city beyond the blue horizon, where the "season" was now in full swing, the struggle at its fiercest, where all natural emotions, all aspirations, must be crushed down by the grim determination to hold one's own in the fray. Ah, how thankful she was to be out of it all, in this blissful Nirvana of Nature!

She turned, with a laugh of joy, to the young man at her side. Tim, with his fair head bared to the summer breeze, with the white crescent formed by a polo cap in the brick-red of his forehead, with his clear eyes—looking out gaily into the sun-bathed world, seemed part of the summer day. And as she laughed, he smiled back at her, his strong white teeth gleaming out beneath his slight fair moustache.

In answer to the enquiry in his eyes, she said gently: "I was just thinking how lovely it is to be here instead of over there—" she nodded to the distance, "in the turmoil of London."

distance, "in the turmoil of London."
"Do you find London a turmoil?"

"Yes. Don't you?"

He shook his head. "Oh, no. I don't let it become a turmoil."

"How do you manage that?"

"If I feel life is moving too fast, I slow it down-

just as I should a motor."

"Ah!" she cried enviously, "that's the splendid part of being a man—you can always stop. But for us, if we can't keep up, life just goes on without us—leaves us behind, like a relentless 'bus, to whom one shouts in vain from the street corner. But you—you can always wait for things to come to you!"

"All the best things do come to one, I think," he

said peacefully.

"I believe they do!" she cried, full of the new

confidence in life with which Tim inspired her.

"And to you," he said, moving closer to her, "they are bound to come. Tell me what you want most in life?"

"How can I tell? I want so much!" she said evasively.

He did not answer for a moment, then looking away

from her he asked abruptly:

"Tell me then one thing only—what sort of man would you like to marry?"

"Oh, an explorer of course! I've always felt that!" she answered without a moment's hesitation.

"An explorer?" he repeated rather blankly.

"Yes-or a bacteriologist."

"Why a bacteriologist?" he asked, almost with irritation in his voice.

"For the same reason as an explorer-because I love people who make discoveries, who want to know

things, find out things—"
"Then, I suppose," Tim said, looking moodily away at the horizon, "you would think my life too

tame for words?"

For the first time she realised that she had vexed him, that the habit of philosophising, of discussing life in the abstract, which was so habitual to her, was incomprehensible to him.

"Your life tame?" she answered quickly, "of course I don't think that. At least I don't feel that it need be tame, it's in your power, isn't it? to make it what you like, to—" she stopped abruptly.

"Go on," he said with interest, leaning towards

her, "tell me what you were going to say."
"Well, I mean," she went on with shy impulsiveness, "that for anyone like you-with your influence, your place in the world, not driven by necessity, as most men are-it's in your power either to make something big and splendid out of life or else just to go through it like a millionaire in a Pullman car, thinking of nothing but being comfortable, not really

living at all. But, of course, you would never do that!" she added gently.

Tim brought his gaze down from the blue sky on which it had been fixed and looked with sudden

seriousness into Marica's eves.

"D'you know, Marica," he said, and she saw he used her name quite unconsciously, "I'm not so sure that I mightn't make a Pullman car affair of life if-if I were left to myself. It's so awfully easy for a fellow like me to get slack and careless, not to bother because life's made so easy for one. And that's rotten, isn't it? One's got to make something out of life—as you said, something big and splendid. I never thought of it before in that way."

"Oh!" she interrupted him eagerly, "and you

could do it, you know—you've got it in you!"
"Have I? Why do you think that?"
She laughed gently. "I saw the way you talked to that old woman at the cottage-how well you understood her! how quick you were to sympathiseso much quicker than I should ever have been."

"But you felt it just the same?"

"Oh, yes, I felt it, but I couldn't express it as you did. And that's so clever!" she said eagerly, "to be able to say quite simple things well—without being banal"

Tim's face glowed with pleasure.

"I love your saying that," he said gently. "I'm not a bit clever really, you know, but somehow-" He put out his hand and took hers in a warm, firm grasp. "D'you know, I feel when I'm with you I could do anything—be anything! What is it?"

And because they both knew, they neither of them spoke, but sat looking out into the summer world in a silence that was more to each of them than any

words.

"Now read aloud to me!" Marica said at last,

turning towards him gaily.

And Tim, taking a well-worn vellum-covered book from his pocket, began to read. She shut her eyes in dreamy contentment—how charming his voice was! And when, from time to time, she looked at him through half-closed lids, she thought how "knightly" he looked, how brave a part he too would have played as one of the Round Table! For the best sort of man, she reflected, has never changed through all the ages—man as Nature made him, primitive and unspoilt, who makes so potent an appeal to the mind of complex woman.

When he had finished, they sat silent for a few minutes, and then, as a distant church-clock struck five o'clock, Tim rose to his feet with a laugh.

"We must go and have tea now!"

He held out his hand to help her to her feet and did not let go of it again as they walked down the hill towards the motor. She did not draw it away. It seemed somehow so natural to be walking hand in hand with Tim over the flowery grass, with the blue sky above and the birds singing in the trees. And these were the only lover-like moments of the day, all the rest of the time he was just the charming playmate he had been that morning by the Serpentine.

They were too happy to talk much as the motor glided homeward through the summer twilight. Only now and again Tim turned his head to look into Marica's eyes with one of his radiant understanding smiles, that set all her pulses waltzing to dreamy music. Did he look at other women like this? she wondered, with a sudden pang of jealousy, as she remembered what people had told her of all the women who had loved him. Were those frank blue eyes, looking into hers, the eyes of a man who makes a sport of breaking hearts? No, no, that was impossible—yet, what did he mean by all this? She knew now that she loved him, that at last the "tidal wave" had come, that was to sweep her off her feet to bliss or to despair. Which was it to be? Did Tim love her too, or was it just his way to hold a woman's hand and look into her eyes? But no, she knew he loved her! From the first moment of their meeting that wonderful night at Covent Garden he had made no secret of his feeling for her. And though she had held back, fenced, eluded him, he had gone on, nothing daunted. Man the Pursuer! She thrilled at the thought and an impish sense of elation made her determine to leave it still to Tim to "make the running."

When they parted at the door of 52 Blenheim

Gardens, she gave him her hand with a smile.

"It's been a lovely day," she said lightly, "and I've enjoyed it ever so much."

"And we'll have another like it?" he asked eagerly.

She shook her head smiling. "Why not?" he persisted.

"Because we couldn't. Haven't you discovered that no good things can be repeated? Pleasures are like cups of tea—the second cup has always a rechauffé flavour. If we went to the country for the day again, the weather would be wet, or the motor would break down, or one of us would be in a bad temper and we should come back cross and tired and wish we hadn't gone."

"Then I must think of another plan?-something

we've never done before?"

"Yes!" she said. And as Denman appeared at this moment in answer to her ring, she vanished, with a wave of her hand, through the doorway.

CHAPTER X.

Mr. Fayne was still sitting at his writing table, his head silhouetted against the fading light from the French window, when Marica opened the door of the library.

"Ah! And have you enjoyed yourself, my love?"

he said, looking up at her dreamily.

"It was heavenly—oh! may I turn up the light, Papa?" and without waiting for his answer, she touched the switch. "I've brought you some wild flowers," she went on, holding out a sheaf of foxgloves and ox-eye-daisies and feathery cow-parsley towards him.

"Thank you, dear child!" he said, with evident

pleasure.

Wild flowers, she knew, were the flowers he cared for most—human agency in Nature annoyed him and the triumphs of London florists left him cold.

"Now, tell me about your day, "he added gently. Marica drew a deep breath. How could she tell him about this golden day? It was far too wonderful

to talk about! But she managed to answer:

"The country was lovely, Papa. Think of a beech wood full of wood pigeons and green fields with bees buzzing, and lambs bleating, and a perfectly glorious cuckoo yodelling away somewhere in the distance—every living thing bursting with delight at being alive. Oh, you can't imagine—sitting here cooped up between four walls with that to look out at—" and she jerked her head at the tiny square of garden outside the windows.

Mr. Fayne put his finger tips together with a smile. "My dear Marica, I can quite well imagine. I can also imagine the precise effect this zoological symphony would have on you after you had been listening

to it for a few days! I would give you, my love, just a week in which to inform me that you thought the drowsy hum of motor buses the sweetest music in the world."

Marica subsided on to the sofa with a laugh. Of course Papa could not forget how she had hated Cornwall where they had spent August and September of last year.

"Must one be dead to all the beauty of Nature because one doesn't rave about bald rocks and frowning mountain brows?" she asked with a shrug. "I don't pretend to like rugged scenery. And mountains weigh on my head like lead. I like nice flat green fields with cows peacefully chumping buttercups in the foreground."

"No cow who has studied diet eats buttercups," he answered drily. "But now, dear child, I think I will take a breath of the air that even here is to be enjoyed." And opening the French window, with

a smile he stepped out on to the tiny lawn.

Marica sat in silence watching the tall figure pacing slowly up and down in the twilight. How splendid and apart he looked! With his eyes—the eyes of a visionary—focussed on the distant line of chimneys, his curved lips moving rhythmically as he murmured Persian poetry, he looked like some inspired bard of ancient Greece who had suddenly descended into this little Kensington back garden. Again she experienced the thrill of pride which his high-souled air had often caused in her, and now more than ever she wanted Tim to know him.

For this day in the country had shown her that her first conception of Tim had been a true one, that he was indeed the simple lovable person she had thought him, whose natural setting was the peaceful life lived close to Nature. And suddenly she felt she wanted Tim to know that the longing for excitement which had led her into such scenes as Covent Garden, had only been a phase in her evolution, the restlessness of a woman who has not yet found herself.

Hitherto she had been so careful to keep on the mask which concealed her real personality and her circumstances, to prevent him from realising that she was one of the girls on whose account he fled the Sheep-Track. But now the time had come to unmask, to make Tim understand that she was not the careless Bohemian he must have thought her, that Covent Garden and the Davenant Hewetsons were not her natural environment, that though she could not speak of her relations with the same warmth with which he spoke of his, yet in their strange inhuman way they were people to be proud of And then a brilliant idea occurred to her. Why not invite Tim to dine and meet Papa? And she would ask Aunt Harriet to make the fourth. That would be splendid!

And as at this moment Mr. Fayne wandered towards

the open window she called out gaily:

"Papa, will you be in to dinner any night this week—for certain?"

"My love! How often do I dine out?" he asked

with a derisive smile.

"Not often, I know. But I wanted to make quite sure of your being at home. The fact is I thought of asking Lord Windlesham to dine."

"Windlesham? Oh, yes, invite him by all

means—''

"Thursday, Papa?"

"Yes, yes, Marica—any night you like!" and he

strolled out again into the twilight.

Marica wrote at once to Aunt Harriet, and then on second thoughts decided to go herself to Queen's Gate and make sure of her accepting the invitation. But when, next morning, she was shown up into the drawing-room, Aunt Charlotte greeted her with the news that Harriet had been sent for by a sick friend at Brighton and would certainly not be home again by Thursday.

"I'm so sorry-I had hoped she would come and

dine to meet-a man I know."

"And who is the man?" Aunt Charlotte enquired. "Oh, Lord Windlesham!" Marica answered, miserably conscious that she was growing pink to the tips of her ears. But Aunt Charlotte's selfabsorption made her the safest of confidantes.

"Ah, indeed!" she answered, peacefully oblivious to the vagaries of Marica's complexion. "A very nice young man, I believe, from all accounts-Caroline Grundisburgh sometimes speaks of him. And where did you make his acquaintance, Marica?"

"Oh, at a ball!" Marica said hastily, "but I must be going now, Aunt Charlotte, and I'm so sorry

Aunt Harriet can't come-"

"If you really want a fourth, my dear Marica," Lady Plumpton said graciously, "I shall be very

pleased to come and dine with you."

"Thank you, it's very kind of you!" Marica murmured. Would Tim find Aunt Charlotte very dull? Still, she reflected, aunts are not expected to be exciting, just as the lion on a silver spoon is not meant to be a realistic study of a gladiatorial combat. And Aunt Charlotte would certainly be an excellent hall-mark-and serve to obliterate the memory of Mrs. Davenant Hewetson!

So she accepted Lady Plumpton's offer gratefully and hurried home to write a note telling Tim that she and her father would be delighted if he would dine with them on the following Thursday evening. The invitation was accepted next morning by telegram from Midshire where Tim was spending a few days with his mother. And now nothing remained but to arrange the banquet.

Léontine's gamine eyes danced with excitement at the prospect; the charming milor who had shown so much discernment with regard to Balzac must be regaled with all the most recherché items in Adolphe's répertoire, and she herself, Léontine, would go early in the morning to Covent Garden with a view to transforming the table into a bower of roses for the occasion. On Wednesday night, the sound of splashing water emanating from her room, announced the fact that Balzac was being given a "shampoo" accompanied with the usual endearments that were supposed to reconcile him to this unwelcome ceremony. "Tiens toi tranquille donc, mon amour, comme tu seras beau demain, mais—oui! tu seras épatant!"

And then at breakfast on Thursday morning the blow fell. A thick, white envelope, addressed in Lady Plumpton's large, legible handwriting, lay beside Marica's plate. What could it portend? Tearing open the flap, Marica read the following:—

"301, Queen's Gate, Wednesday evening.

Dearest Marica,

I am sorry to tell you that I am far from well to-night, with one of my troublesome attacks of asthma, and both Dr. Pudfield and Dawkins absolutely forbid me to dine with you to-morrow. Of course I would willingly take the risk rather than disappoint you, but they will, neither of them, hear of it, so I fear I must submit.

Believe me,
Always your affectionate aunt,
CHARLOTTE PLUMPTON."

- "Papa!" said Marica, looking up from the letter at *The Spectator* which concealed Mr. Fayne's face at the other end of the table, "isn't it tiresome of Aunt Charlotte, she can't dine with us to-night!"
- "To-night! To-night?" murmured Mr. Fayne withdrawing his mind from an absorbing article on the 'Hyksos,' and looking dreamily across at Marica. "Ah! to be sure, you had invited Charlotte to dine to meet—who was it, my love?"
 - "Lord Windlesham."
- "Yes, of course, Lord Windlesham! but that is really very unfortunate; all the more so as I have just received a note from Professor Duchêne begging me to dine with him to-night to meet Herr Winkel-

stein from Vienna and discuss the new discoveries at Carchemish."

"But you are not going, Papa?" Marica cried

aghast.

"I fear I shall be obliged to, my love. Herr Winkelstein will only be in London for two nights, and it will be our last opportunity of meeting."
"But, Papa, you promised—"

"I know, my dear Marica; but after all Lord Windlesham will not melt away! He lives in London, I believe? Then what is easier than to invite him

for another night?"

How could she ever make him understand, the girl thought despairingly as she looked at the cold blue eyes lit only with the light of reason that confronted her over the pages of The Spectator. She determined to make one more frantic effort.

"Papa! You don't realise what this means to me. It is more than just an ordinary dinner. Everything, everything depends on it!" She felt stinging tears rising to her eyes. "Papa, I beg you! implore you! If I never ask anything of you again

in my life-do this one thing for me!"

"My love, you are becoming hysterical!" Mr. Fayne said gently, as he rose and gathered up The Spectator preparatory to leaving the room. are losing all sense of proportion. Control yourself, Marica! I have already explained to you my reasons for not being able to dine at home this evening. That ends the matter. Let me hear no more about it!" He put his long, ascetic hand on her shoulder as he passed her going towards the door, and reaching it, he turned again and smiled at her with the cold beam of a February sun. "Farewell, my love. Invite Lord Windlesham for another evening, and I shall be delighted to make his acquaintance.'

The door closed behind him.

Marica, her elbows resting on the breakfast table, her chin in her hands, sat with the tears rolling down her cheeks. What was to be done? Would it be any good trying to persuade Aunt Charlotte that dining out this glorious summer evening could not affect her asthma? She knew all about Aunt Charlotte's asthma; long ago Harriet had told her of this affliction—in reality a difficulty of breathing, caused, Dr. Pudfield had explained to Harriet "aside," by excess of nourishment, and want of exercise. "But Charlotte likes to think it is asthma," Harriet had said with a smile, "and, of course, one cannot expect a 'family doctor' with seven children to support, to live by dealing out home truths."

Would it be possible, just for once, to persuade Aunt Charlotte of the small danger to life that her complaint carried with it? She suddenly determined to try. Springing up, she hastily dabbed the tears away from her eyes, and a few minutes later was spinning in the fleetest of taxis towards Queen's Gate.

"Her ladyship," Perkins informed her, was "confined to her room," but if Miss Marica would wait in the drawing-room, Dawkins would enquire—

"No, no," interrupted Marica, unable to endure delay, "I'll go up and find Dawkins myself!" She ran quickly up the stairs to the door of the pleasant room on the second floor which had been given up to the "treasure" in consequence of her inability to climb to higher regions.

In answer to Marica's light tap, a partially muffled

voice called out, "Come in!"

It was the hour of Dawkins's "elevenses," and a steaming cup of cocoa accompanied by an immense slice of plum-cake, was evidently responsible for the worthy soul's impaired articulation. She arose, still masticating with Fletcherite thoroughness, and stood respectfully waiting to hear the reason of this unexpected visit.

"Sit down, Dawkins, and go on with your cocoa!" Marica said, sinking into a chair. "And now tell me, can't you persuade Lady Plumpton to dine with

me to-night?"

Dawkins shook her head slowly as she emptied the

contents of one ample cheek, swallowed laboriously,

and then spoke.

"I'm afraid not, mum, it would never do for her ladyship to go out at night with one of her attacks on. I couldn't consci-hentiously advise it—I really couldn't."

"You old humbug," thought Marica, "you know the fact is you don't want to be kept up at night to undress her ladyship and that's your only reason!" But she knew her best chance lay in being conciliatory to the "treasure."

"Dawkins," she said in honeyed accents, "don't you think that if her ladyship had both windows of the brougham up and came home very early—"

But Dawkins continued to shake her head disapprovingly. "Night hair is always night hair!" she said ominously, with the careful insertion of h's which usually accompanied her determination to be impressive. "I couldn't consci-hentiously say otherwise!"

she repeated.

Wild ideas of bribery rushed through Marica's brain—would any gift have power to sway the imperturbable Dawkins, who, with pursed lips and the plump fourth finger of the hand that held the cup elegantly hooked, was peacefully sipping the boiling cocoa? Visions of plush frames containing views of Bournemouth, of padded morocco photograph albums, of fancy work nightgown cases, or brush and comb bags, such as a rapid survey of Dawkins's room suggested to be dear to its owner's heart, followed each other in rapid succession, all to be finally abandoned as hopeless—Dawkins was already provided with every article which the presiding genii of all London's Fancy Departments could devise—tokens of the family's gratitude for her services. No! it would be useless to attempt conciliating Dawkins.

She rose hastily to her feet.

"Well, good morning, Dawkins. I must go and send a telegram."

There was nothing for it but to put Tim off. It

would be possible, of course, to invite Aunt Louisa, but she would simply freeze him with her erudition—and besides she would probably refuse to come.

Reaching home she wrote a telegram to Tim and

handed it to Denman.

"Tell Ermyntrude to take that immediately,

please!"

Ermyntrude was the little cockney "gamine" who acted as Adolphe's aide-de-camp and filled up her time going on errands, which consisted mostly of staring in at drapers' windows or standing with open mouth before the illustrated programme of a picture palace. With an imitation of Marica's last motor hat perched on the top of her curled head, she could be seen from the window, strolling down the street, the telegram held between a grimy thumb and finger.

"Ermyntrude, the messenger of Fate," murmured Marica as she watched the progress of her uncertain footsteps. "There goes the last ray of hope!"

And she sank on to the sofa burying her face in the

cushions.

Léontine and Adolphe, like the true artists that they were, wept tears of disappointed ambition at the failure of the dinner.

"Mademoiselle should have seen the sole à l'ambassadrice that Adolphe has confectioned, of a rose colour the most exquisite, with a design of truffles in hearts and crescents, and the bombe glacée à la Vésuve, and, Mademoiselle, the roses that I procured early this morning in the market of Covent Garden! fresh! but of a freshness, still with the dew upon the petals. And, encore, Mademoiselle, the toilette of Balzac was prepared—rubans mandarins which show up his beaux yeux à ravir!"

"Bien, Léontine, it will be for another time. We will eat the sole à l'ambassadrice ourselves and I shall enjoy the roses alone."

"What will Mademoiselle wear for the diner

manqué?" Léontine enquired when the time came for dressing.

"Oh, any old rag, Léontine!"

"The rose tea-gown in which Mademoiselle always finds herself so comfortable?"

"Yes, that will do very well."

"Coifferai-je, Mademoiselle, à la Monna Delza ou à la Cléo de Mérode?"

"Anyhow you like, Léontine, it doesn't matter."

"Mademoiselle a tort. To have the appearance triste is to increase the tristesse of the mind. Mademoiselle must look gay and her reflection in the glass will have an effet égayant!"

By a perversity of Fate, the coiffure was an even greater success than usual. Léontine surveyed the result of her skill with all the satisfied fervour of a creator who feels, that whether his inspiration receives recognition from the world or not, it has at least expressed his idea. Mademoiselle was lovely to-night, even lovelier than usual, in the slim gown of rosecoloured silk with its dull gold trimming and her hair bound closely round her head, encircled by a golden fillet. The morning's tears had thrown faint shadows round her eyes and an unusual pallor over her cheeks, but at twenty-three, with a still perfect complexion and the freshness of youth unimpaired, a wan and weary air may have a plaintive piquancy all its own. And though she was sad, there was nothing of the "hungry" look about Marica, as she made her way down to the drawing-room and sat alone in the twilight, waiting for Denman to announce dinner. For the hungry look is born of thwarted strivings. Marica had not struggled; it was simply that Fate, with the malicious intent of a person holding out a toy to a child and then hiding it behind his back, had given her a glimpse of possibilities, hitherto undreamt of, only to snatch them away again just as she put out her hand to grasp them. And her face to-night was the face of an unhappy child who has been promised a party and then told to sit at home and do its sums.

The extraordinary depression peculiar to Kensington settled down upon her. Here in this backwater the stream of life rolled by unheeded; in the innumerable tiny back gardens, old people, who had dined early, were strolling out to take a last breath of the close summer air, or embittered elderly parlourmaids were watering despondent geraniums, whilst on the road side of the house an aged man with an organ, who came round regularly every Thursday evening, was droning out sentimental airs elsewhere long since forgotten.

charms—" how many Thursday evenings she had sat and listened to the air that brought a flickering smile of reminiscence to the octogenarians of the Gardens, but filled her with an overwhelming sense of pathos at the thought of the lovers who had poured out their restrained devotions to charms that now lay buried and ignored by the world that went roystering on

overhead.

It was really no good trying not to be morbid to-night, and she sat looking out into the darkening garden, thinking of all the lovers the world had seen, whose passions and hopes and fears and jealousies and regrets had seemed so tremendous to themselves but mattered so little to the rest of the human race, when the door opened and Denman's voice broke the stillness.

"Lord Windlesham!"

She started to her feet in a dream. What did it mean? But Tim was coming towards her, his happy sunburnt face looming through the twilight, holding out two eager hands in greeting.

"Little ghost," he said, taking her hands and holding them firmly clasped in his. "How weird and strange you looked sitting there all alone in the

twilight! Weren't you expecting me?"
"No. Didn't you get my telegram?"

He shook his head.

"But I wired this morning!"

"To put me off? Didn't you want me?"

"Of course I wanted you, but—well, it's all been so unfortunate. Papa had promised to be at home but after all he had to dine out to talk about Seleucus or somebody like that, with a professor from Vienna, and then the aunt I'd asked to meet you couldn't come either—she had asthma—a sudden attack—the climate I suppose—" and then, as she looked out at the cloudless evening sky, she added with a laugh:

"I know it sounds absurd, and how my telegram

failed to reach you I can't imagine!"

"What does it matter?" Tim said with a smile. "I've got you all to myself—isn't that a much nicer

arrangement?"

Of course it was! And after all, she told herself, it was no good to take life too seriously. These improbable coincidences had occurred and through no fault of her own, and the only thing now was to get all the joy one could out of the turn events had taken. If Fate had wrested the matter from her hands and decreed that she should sit no longer alone in the twilight sunk in Kensington depression, but dine tête-à-tête with the only man in London she wanted to dine with, why not take the goods the gods provided with a thankful heart?

So she smiled back at him gaily, and when Denman announced dinner ten minutes later, she led the way down the narrow staircase, filled with peaceful contentment.

The meal itself was perfect; the table, a June garden in miniature; with fairy pergolas and dwarf standards of the tiniest pink roses, whilst the six courses, of which the menu consisted, were each as exquisite as a chef in a frenzy of inspiration could evolve. Soup like velvet, sauces that tasted of no ingredients the most discerning of palates could give a name to; an entrée that would have filled the soul of Mrs. Beeton with despairing envy, mysterious salads that surely

never grew in any earthly kitchen garden, ice that looked like the sunset on Mont Blanc, and tasted of all the fruits of Paradise—testified to the existence of soaring genius somewhere in the basement.

Everything had been prepared in the morning after the custom of the French chef, and it needed only ten minutes for Adolphe, with the eager assistance of Léontine, to add the final touches. As to the decorations, Léontine, having procured the roses, could not resist the pleasure of arranging them in a manner to cheer Mademoiselle at her lonely dinner. Dear things! Marica thought appreciatively, it was splendid of them to rise to the occasion like this and evolve such a banquet at a moment's notice!

She looked at Tim across the bower of roses as each *chef d'oeuvre* was passed to him. At first he had looked surprised, then bewildered, finally he broke into a laugh.

"By Jove! You've got a marvellous cook! I've never met such a dinner out of Paris!"

"Adolphe is a Parisian."

"Ah, a chef? No wonder! But he's amazing! Don't invite royal personages to dine or they'll commandeer him."

"He wouldn't go. Adolphe is a democrat. Besides

he adores Léontine."

"And Léontine adores Balzac. What a devoted trio! By the way, I hope Balzac is to appear to night."

"Of course—if you like to see him."

And at the end of dinner the door opened to admit a small woolly figure that approached the table with lagging footsteps—Balzac, en grande tenue, with a pink line parting his snowy coat and running from the tip of his retroussé nose, to the beginning of his bushy tail. An exquisitely tied bow of orange ribbon was fastened to the side of his black velvet and silver collar.

"How he hates it!" Marica cried sympathetically,

as the little dog came forward, wincing at the indignity

of his adornment.

"Poor fellow! We all hate 'best clothes,' don't we, Balzac?" said Tim, patting his knee in invitation. Balzac sprang up on to it immediately, huddling against Tim's shirt front with the camaraderie of fellow feeling.

"He will be quite happy to-morrow," said Marica, "because he will probably find some railings that have just been tarred to rub against. Shall we go upstairs?" she added, getting up from the table, "we will have our coffee there."

Afterwards in the drawing-room Tim wandered towards the piano and took up a song of Nina's that stood open upon it.

"Ah! you sing?" he asked eagerly.
"Never before an audience!" she answered, smiling, "but that song belongs to a friend of minethe greatest friend I have, who sings it divinely."

"Who is she?"

"A Mrs. Touraine. Have you ever heard of her?" He shook his head.

"Balzac introduced us!" she said, and she told him the story of Balzac joining the bridge club in Knightsbridge and bringing Nina home with him.

"I was feeling very bored and lonely that day," she explained, "and she was so kind and charming—

I loved her at once."

"Why should you ever have been lonely?" he asked gently. And then he came across the room and sat down beside her.

"Oh, Marica!" he said, taking her hand in his strong, brown ones, "are you happy to-night?"

"Yes," she said, trying to control the little tremble

in her voice.

"And so am I-wildly, gloriously happy! Marica, do you know, you're the loveliest thing God ever made?"

Suddenly he took her in his arms and began to pour forth a torrent of eager words.

"Marica—darling—loveliest—I love you so! Ever since that evening at Covent Garden I've thought of nothing else! And all that wonderful day in the country I wanted to tell you but somehow you seemed so cold."

She smiled. He had thought her cold! But before she had found the words to answer him, Tim had

gone on again.

"Darling, you've no idea how lovely you are! with your grey eyes and your little provoking nose and the dear little mouth with the curling lips. You're so young and sweet and dear-Marica! I love the frank, fearless way you look at me! I love the way you turn that little head of yours-the way you move and speak—everything about you. But it isn't only that I love—it's you yourself, darling, the lovely gracious woman that you are. You're so fine and delicate and yet you're so big, little Marica! Such miles up above the ordinary women of the world with their pettiness and tiny ambitions! I've never met anyone a bit like you-never! Wasn't it wonderful meeting as we did-just finding each other in that crowd-you and I who had been waiting for one another all our lives! Isn't life splendid, darlingat last, at last!"

He drew her closer to him and kissed her pas-

sionately on the lips.

"Oh, my darling, my darling! I love you so!

I do love you so!"

For a moment she lay unresisting in his arms—a sort of giddiness overcame her, as if the blood had ebbed away from her brain, leaving her only half-conscious. And then all at once, she seemed to come to herself again, and at the same moment a wild panic seized her. What had happened? Where had she drifted to? In all her life no man had ever held her in his arms, had ever kissed her in this way. It was wonderful, yet terrible—she felt as if all her defences had suddenly been beaten down and the citadel of her inmost self taken at a rush

Tearing herself from Tim's arms, she started trembling to her feet. Then with a little quick gasp she turned and fled incontrollably from the room.

She must be alone, to think it all over. That was the one thought in her mind, as she threw herself down on her knees at the window of her bedroom and leant out into the warm summer darkness. It had come to her at last—this wonderful thing that all her life she had read and dreamt about. Yet how different it was to books or dreams—this tremendous force that had swept her off her feet with terrifying suddenness. But now that the first shock was over, fear slowly left her and she was conscious only of a new wonderful happiness—an intoxication of happiness that was like nothing she had ever imagined. As she looked up to the stars, it seemed to her as if her body had ceased to exist and that she was a spirit soaring in regions where space and time were not.

An hour passed. Yet she felt no need of sleep, no desire to sink in oblivion, this vivid sense of living. Ah! yes, this was living at last—this glorious freedom of the soul from the prison-house that matter builds around it shutting out all the great realities for which one came into being. Long ago she had cried out for the curtain to go up on life, imagining that with physical activity would come the sense of living; now she understood that excitement is only the drug by which humanity seeks to dull its desire of life. Only one perhaps in a hundred of London's striving millions, she reflected, ever reached the state of being for which the human soul was created, ever got outside the prison-house; the rest sought in various ways, by work, by dissipation, by joining in the fierce struggle for wealth, or by actual drugs or drink to lull the promptings of the spirit that urged them to fulfil their destiny.

It was this for which, as Tim had said, they had all their lives been waiting; this to which her strange, unloved childhood, her lonely, perplexed youth, had led up at last! It had come so naturally; there had been no striving or contriving such as led up to the "marriages that have been arranged" by society, they had just met and loved each other as Nature meant them to do—as men and women had done ever since the world began.

She thrilled at the remembrance of his voice repeating the words, which by their very simplicity, appealed to her as no well-turned phrases could possibly have done. "I love you so! but I do love you so!"—the cry of the heart, which though old as the world itself, has never lost its power! Only the man or woman whom temperament or circumstances have placed amongst artificialities can enter in the full joy of simplicity. The commonplace mind craves for the unusual. But Marica Favne, accustomed from her infancy to complexities, to a life in which the natural emotions played no part, craved for nothing so much as the normal. After all, she told herself, the things we feel most deeply are not subtle, out-of-the-way emotions, but quite simple, homely ones that everyone has had since the human race began. They may be hackneyed—unworthy of the pen of modern journalism, but still they are the most real things in the world after all!

She closed her eyes and pictured her life with Tim. How perfect it would be! They would live together at his home in Midshire, that he had talked about the other day in the country; she imagined them walking side by side on summer evenings between the high borders of tall, white lilies and delphiniums he had described to her—sitting together over a blazing log fire on winter evenings, reading aloud to each other from their favourite books. They would very seldom come up to London, and then never bother about society—just see a good play now and then, listen to music, and go to the Zoo to offer bananas to Susan, scent to the ring-tailed coati. They would have lots of animals at home, of course—Tim's polo ponies and hunters, and there would

be Tommy and Balzac, each with his own personality to watch and wonder at! There would be puppies too, and baby birds, and colts and Persian kittensthere was nothing she loved so much as young things! And with the thought there came a still more poignant thrill of joy-they would have children! Boys!-not because she loved them best, but because the right sort of men were so terribly wanted in this overwomaned island. She would bring them up to be kind and gentle, as well as manly; to be full of reverence for good women and of pity for the ones who could not manage to be good. For the destiny of woman lies in the hands of mothers. All the femininism in her rose in response to the new field for activities that opened out before her. And as she looked up to the stars, she whispered joyfully: "Thank Allah that I was born a woman!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE next morning at breakfast a letter, addressed in large primitive handwriting, was brought to her by Denman.

"Waiting for an answer, m'm," he said, standing

beside her whilst she read it.

"My darling," it began,

"Did I frighten you last night? If so, forgive me, for I love you and I couldn't keep it to myself any longer. Do you care for me a little bit too, I wonder? I'm on guard to-day and can't get away, but I want to know if you'll dine with me to-night at my rooms and bring the friend who sings. Say yes, darling-just yes, by bearer. I don't know how to live till we meet again.

Тім."

She put down the letter.

"Say yes, Denman."

The old man left the room.

"And who is your strangely unlettered correspondent, my love?" asked Mr. Fayne, with a derisive glance at the writing, which certainly was plainly legible right across the table.

"Lord Windlesham, Papa!" she managed to

answer in a level voice.

"Indeed! A most unlettered young man, I fear!" he murmured, subsiding again behind the pages of The Times.

Marica looked at him meditatively. Could she tell Papa now what had happened? That she loved this unlettered young man and was going to marry him? But as she strove to speak the words they froze upon her lips and she decided to wait another day or two and then tell him suddenly—when he was just going out, so that she need not wait to hear his comments. Yes, another time would do quite well!

When breakfast was over she went up to the

drawing-room to find Léontine awaiting her.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle, but Ermyntrude desires to make a confession!"

"It sounds very alarming, what crime has she

committed, Léontine?"

"Oh, Mademoiselle, the gamine herself will tell you, she is now at the door waiting to enter." Léontine threw open the door and the trembling

Ermyntrude tottered into the room.

Between her gasps for breath and the mopping of her round eyes with a large grey pocket handkerchief, she told her tale. It transpired that, owing to the unholy fascination which the cinematograph exercises over the vacant-minded, Ermyntrude on her way to the post office with Marica's telegram to Tim, had succumbed to the attractions of the posters outside a "Picture Palace" and laid out the sixpence given her for the message on a seat to view the performance. She had quite intended of course to return home and fetch another sixpence of her own, but previous visits to the same haven of her desires had resulted in bankruptcy, and only fivepence halfpenny had been forthcoming. So the telegram had reposed peacefully in her pocket until this morning when, on her drawing out the aforesaid grey pocket handkerchief, it had fluttered to the ground to be instantly retrieved by the hawk-eyed Léontine who relentlessly drove the culprit to confess her crime.

"Ermyntrude, why did you do it?" Marica asked

gently.

Ermyntrude shook her head slowly from side to side in dazed bewilderment at the problem of her own

psychology.

"I don't know, mum," she said at last, wonderingly. "I don't know what come over me!" And then in a voice of still deeper mystification she added: "I can't think what Mother 'ud say if she heard—

she's always brought us up careful, and then to go and do a thing like that—well, I don't know what

Mother 'ud say!"

This was really unanswerable, and Marica finding the whole lecture she might have delivered on the evils of improvidence, added to the sin of embezzlement, forestalled by the delinquent herself, could only murmur:

"Well, you'll never do it again, will you?"

"Oh, no, mum, I hope I shan't, I do hope I shan't! I can't think," she added, returning to the charge, however I came to do it this time!"

"I suppose the fact is simply that you're very fond

of picture palaces?"

"Oh, mum!" A rapturous gleam broke out over Ermyntrude's features. "It was 'The Bandit's Bride' this time, mum. And it was wonderful!"

Her voice glowed with thrilling recollections. Suddenly Marica felt the tears rush to her eyes. How awful to have only $5\frac{1}{2}d$. in the world for one's entire capital and to be consumed with a craving for the romance of life! And so, after slipping five shillings into the girl's hand, wherewith to indulge in a perfect orgy of picture palaces in future, she hurried to the telephone to ring up Nina before taking Balzac out for his morning constitutional.

Nina declared herself delighted to join the little dinner-party "Darling, I'm so glad for you.

Is everything going well?"

"Yes, dear Nina, life's just too glorious for words!"

And if a little sigh greeted the exclamation, Marica

was too happy to realise it.

When she went out she felt as if she walked on air. An unearthly glamour pervaded the grey streets of London; even Kensington itself seemed lit by unwonted radiance. Why had she ever thought it melancholy? Why had she found so much to carp at in the human race? Suddenly she felt she loved everybody; even the people she had thought of as

her bêtes noires, only roused in her this morning a smiling pity. It was simply that they were unhappy and dissatisfied which made them dull, or spiteful, or boring! She would have beamed on Mrs. Draycott herself if she had happened to pass her in the street, and when she did meet "Josh" Davenant Hewetson on her way through the Park she found herself according him a smile of such glowing friendliness that his eyes started out of his plump white face in

gratified surprise.

A wretched woman from whom she bought a bunch of lavender for half-a-crown, reminded her of the time long ago when she had felt she could never share Aunt Louisa's enthusiasm for the East End with all its ugliness and squalor, but that too was changed now, for to-day she saw that there was beauty everywhere if one knew where to look for it, and suddenly she longed that everyone should see it, should feel the beauty and the joy of life as she now felt it The door of a little Catholic church she was passing stood open and an impulse came to her to go inside and thank for her happiness. And as she knelt there in the half-light with the sensuous smell of incense around her, she understood for the first time the power that the Church of Rome exercises over the minds of men and women and the peace of creeping into her dim sanctuaries to pour forth one's joys and sorrows She rose from her knees, slipped the sovereigns in her purse into the alms-box at the door, and walked home with a smile on her lips.

The evening came at last and with it Nina, fresh and charming as ever and full of interest in the turn

events had taken.

"I'm so glad for you, darling, so glad!" she murmured, pressing Marica's hand as they glided eastward together in a taxi.

"Oh, Nina, how I wish you'd had the same luck!"
Suddenly, to Marica's surprise, the green eyes

filled with tears.

"Don't let's talk about myself," she said hastily.

"Nina, something's the matter! What is it?"

What had happened to Nina? Marica wondered. Several times lately she had seemed distraite when plans for amusement were under discussion. Was she ill, or was even her joie de vivre flagging under the stress of perpetual motion?

"I can't tell you now," Nina said hastily, "another time, dear! There is something-but to-night we've got to be quite happy! You're looking charming, darling!" she whispered when they had reached St. James's Street and were on their way up the narrow staircase.

Nina was always a true friend in these little ways; she knew that nothing helps so much to make a woman look her best as to be told she does.

A small oak-panelled hall, decorated with heads and skins, led into the cheerful sitting-room looking out into the street. It was a warm night, and through the open windows came the hum of the traffic borne on the soft evening air.

Lord Windlesham and Captain Harding were standing side by side on the hearthrug waiting for their guests. How splendidly healthy they both looked, Marica reflected as they came towards them. With their fresh skins, glossy hair, and their shining teeth and collars, they looked as if they had just got out of their tubs-cold, of course-and given themselves the rub down with a rough towel that the Englishman regards as almost a religious duty. As a matter of fact this was precisely what they had been doing.

"We only got back from polo an hour ago," Lord Windlesham explained, "so you must forgive our complexions!" And indeed his fair skin, basted by the hot afternoon sun, was brickier than ever.

"When are you coming to Ranelagh?" he went on eagerly, as he led Marica to a seat in the window. "I should like to feel you were looking on when I play for the 'Black Panthers' on Saturday."

"I should love to come—oh, are these the birds?"

she added as her glance fell on a large cage at one

side of the window covered with green baize.

"Ah, yes, you must see them—they're such ripping little beggars—Tommy, the one with the blue chest, is my special pal . . ." Tim said as he took off the covering and displayed a quantity of tiny tropical birds in the act of composing themselves to sleep in tightly packed rows along the perches. "It seems a shame to wake 'em just as they've gone to bed," he went on, looking at them fondly, "but I want you so much to see Tommy. There he is—just going to sleep on the edge of the seed-tin. I can't think why he does that, but probably he eats such a heavy supper that he can't walk away again."

The cage was beautifully kept, the bars bright and shining, the floor smoothly sanded, a clean bit of sugar stuck between the wires at the side. At one end was the seed-tin with Tommy asleep on the edge; at the other a glass water trough with a card hanging over it on which was written in Tim's large legible handwriting, this injunction: "You are requested not

to wash your feet in the drinking-water."

"They would do it, y' know!" he said, as Marica gave vent to a little bubble of laughter. "So I put in a bath for them down below. But they won't use it!" he added with a sigh, "really seem to enjoy the flavour of feet in their drinks—odd, isn't it? Ah,

here's dinner-shall we go in?"

The discreet, clean-shaven manservant had announced the meal. Lord Windlesham gave his arm to Mrs. Touraine and they moved into the cosy diningroom next door. A round table, smothered in Caroline Testout roses and lit with little pink-shaded electric candles was set for four.

It looked deliciously inviting—no wonder these sort of men were not in a hurry to marry when they could surround themselves with all the comfort and luxury that are popularly supposed to be in a woman's power alone to arrange.

How did they manage it? It was really rather

annoying, for it seemed to give them no trouble to bring about a state of affairs that a woman toils half the morning to accomplish. Lord Windlesham had been out all day, yet here was dinner as perfectly cooked and served as if he had spent hours interviewing chefs and butlers. And it was more than thishe possessed that marvellous faculty for creating a homey atmosphere all around him, a talent as rare as it is delightful for making one feel happy and caredfor, which the most luxurious restaurant in the world can never inspire.

"What delicious roses!" Marica said with a little sigh of contentment,

Tim turned to her with one of his most radiant

smiles.

"My mother sent them to me this morning from Merewater—she grew them all herself."

"And never sends them to anyone but you?"

"How did you know that? One day," he went on in a low voice, "you will see her garden—it's wonderful, just like herself! Do you care for gardens and country things like that?" he added eagerly.

She knew she adored them and was on the point of saying so when she became suddenly conscious of "the Tinker's" hard brown eyes fixed on her across the table. What was the matter with Captain Harding, and why had his presence the effect of casting a blight on her happiness? It had been just the same at Covent Garden, and again at Ascot. And now to-night as the conversation proceeded she became more and more conscious of his veiled hostility. What had inspired it? Had he conceived for her one of those mysterious antipathies—a matter of antagonistic magnetic currents that like all people of definite personality she had from time to time encountered—or was this hostility based on some tangible cause de guerre?

And then suddenly the explanation occurred to her—Captain Harding thought she had designs on

Tim! For the first time the thought of Tim's "eligibility"—oh! hateful word!—occurred to her. So far she had been too happy to think about it; Tim had seemed to her just a person very lovable and very charming, whose environment of wealth and ease and beauty were only his natural setting—the pleasant scheme of things that had made him what he was. But now, in Captain Harding's derisive eyes, she read the world's belief in such a point of view. And with the realisation the sense of well-being that had enveloped her as they sat down to dinner, was gradually dispelled and for the first time since she had met Tim she found it difficult to talk naturally, to be herself with him, and she became as artificial as every sensitive woman must become when conscious of an unfriendly environment. She heard herself answering Tim's enquiries in a tone of frosty gaiety calculated to avert any suspicion that might be lurking in "the Tinker's" mind of her intentions. To-night she must be more than ever elusive—more than ever before, she would leave it to Tim to "make the running" and indeed Tim appeared nothing loth to accept the rôle assigned to him. Leaning towards her eagerly he continued to ask her about her tastes, her likes, her dislikes with unabated interest. Did she care for music? He adored it! Yes, she liked it, but not enough to go to concerts and sit in a row of stuffy velvet chairs in a dingy concert hall with people in uninspiring clothes all round one.

"Just as I love Browning, but I don't want to hear him read aloud by earnest-minded people at a Brown-

ing reading!"

"No, I know what you mean—one wants harmonious surroundings. And one would like to be able to listen to music in a wood with nothing but the birds for the rest of the audience. Still, you like the opera?"

And now for the first time he made her feel her ignorance, for he began to talk of Wagner with a

knowledge that took her right out of her depth at once. He was no fool, she realised, this happy, poloplaying, bird-fancying young man, for he could talk of music, art, sculpture with a versatility that filled

her with despairing envy.

The conversation had become general now, and when they touched on politics she recognised again her limitations. Ah! why hadn't Papa kept his place in the great world where such things as these were to be met with on one's daily path? Why hadn't she had Anne's chances—the chances of a girl who meets celebrities at every turn, who goes to the opera twice a week all through the season, who learns her politics at dinner-parties and never knows the weariness of painfully acquiring information? From time to time she had tried heroically to read up the political situation in the morning leaders, but few women can sustain an interest in a subject that makes no personal appeal to them. And not only she knew no one in political life, but no one who ever cared to discuss it. Mr. Favne took no interest in it, and in Nina's circle politics were mainly referred to as bearing on the increasing expenses incurred in the upkeep of a motor.

Nina herself was holding her own brilliantly in the conversation, skilfully gliding over the thin ice of her knowledge on to firmer ground with a clever woman's mental agility, and it was evident that Captain Harding, like every other man or boy to whom she cared to make herself charming, had fallen, momentarily,

at least, under her spell.

After dinner, when they went back to the cosy sitting-room Tim led Marica to the small oak bookcase in the corner and showed her its contents.

"There are not many of them, are there?" he said with a laugh, "but you see I read the same ones over and over again. Stevenson and Lindsay Gordon, and—oh! you do love 'Alice in Wonderland,' don't you?" he added eagerly, pointing to a well-worn red volume.

"Of course I do! How can you ask?"

"D'you know, I was quite afraid of asking--I should have minded so dreadfully if you'd said no!"

And they both laughed because they were so happy to find that on this essential point they were in agreement.

"Even Papa appreciates 'Alice in Wonderland,'" Marica remarked, "he says that no one's education is complete without a thorough knowledge of it, and that they ought to include an Alice paper in the examination for degrees in Mental and Moral Science."

"What a splendid idea—no one given a degree if they were ploughed in Alice. Isn't it awful to think of all the wretched people who lived before it was written? But look at my new edition of Jane Austen—a present from my mother last week."

"Do show me a photograph of your mother!" Marica said impulsively when they had examined the

row of beautifully bound books.

Tim pointed silently to a dull silver frame that stood on the writing-table, containing the picture of a beautiful old woman with delicate aquiline features and smiling eyes exactly like Tim's.

"Oh, what a lovely face!" Marica could not help

exclaiming.

"One day—soon—you must see her for yourself!" Tim said, coming close and speaking in a low voice. "You will love her. And Claire too—my sister—and then I long to show you Merewater."

"Is that a picture of it?" she asked, looking at a water-colour painting of a low white stone house set

in a wide expanse of rolling green lawns.

"Yes, and this is it again," he said, taking up a photograph of an old garden with long grass walks and high herbaceous borders and tall yew hedges.

It was so like Tim—just the sort of home one would expect him to have! In imagination, she saw him as a small, fair-haired boy with sun-burnt, chubby legs, running along those garden paths, or wielding a tiny cricket bat in a corner of the lawn, living out his sunny, peaceful, cared-for childhood, so different

to her own, passed in dusty continental towns or arid solitudes. Yet if Richard Fayne had not dreamt long ago of the Westshire canal her childhood might have been just like his! Unconsciously she gave a little sigh.

He looked at her with gentle enquiry in his eyes. "I was thinking," she said slowly, "how different

our lives have been.

"Hasn't yours been happy?"

She gave a little shrug. "It's been so—odd. I try to think like Browning: 'Rejoice that man is hurled from change to change unceasingly—' At any rate, I've been hurled enough!" she added with a smile.

"Have you?" he said sympathetically. "I should hate that, you know! I like the dear old things I've

always been accustomed to."

"So should I if I'd had them-if I'd had that," she

added nodding at the picture of Tim's home.

"Do you like it? Do you think you could be happy there?" he asked eagerly, coming closer again. "Tim!" Harding's voice sounded suddenly across

the room. "Mrs. Touraine is going to sing to us!"

Nina had sat down at the piano and now she began to sing—weird little Russian songs, and then an old French ballad, and after that she sprang up and said it was Lord Windlesham's turn. Tim declined at first, but Harding insisted, marching him by the arm to Nina's side where he was obliged to remain, Nina playing his accompaniments. Harding hastily took Tim's vacated place at Marica's side, and for the rest of the evening she had no further conversation with Tim. Only when they got up to go he contrived to whisper to her as he helped her on with her cloak in a corner of the little hall: "Darling, I'm coming to-morrow, will you be at home at four o'clock?"

She nodded assent and a few moments later was whirling homewards with Nina in the direction of Kensington.

CHAPTER XII.

THE two friends did not speak for several moments as the taxi glided westwards. Then Marica said suddenly:

"Nina, why do you think Captain Harding hates

me so much?"

"You think he does? I'm afraid you're right. He is an enemy, Marica—I felt that too. At first I thought it was only the natural suspicion with which every man looks on the woman who seems likely to marry his best friend. Men, you see, are all unconscious cynics where marriage is concerned—their idea of standing by a pal is to ride him off anyone, however attractive, whilst ours is to egg one on to marry anybody, however unattractive. We idealise marriage as we idealise everything; they see it as it really is—a toss-up with the odds all against one!"

She gave a little sigh and again Marica wondered what had gone wrong in Nina's life that inspired her

with this unwonted cynicism.

"However," Nina went on reflectively, "it isn't only that with Captain Harding. There's something more than just a vague disbelief in marriage at the back of his mind. He's got something against you. Has Lord Windlesham met your father, by the way?" she added abruptly.

"No," and Marica explained about her two attempts to arrange a meeting and the fiasco in which the

dinner-party had resulted.

"Still," she added, "it was all right in the end for Tim came and we had the loveliest evening together. Isn't it strange how we wrestle against Fate and all the time she is keeping something splendid up her sleeve for one? I did everything possible to prevent Tim coming, but Fate was determined to outwit me and she did."

Nina was silent for a moment. "Oh, Marica!" she broke out at last, "I am so sorry it all happened as it did!"

"Why are you sorry, Nina?"

"Because, oh, well, darling, if Lord Windlesham told Captain Harding all about it—don't you see it must have sounded extraordinary? Such an impossible chain of coincidences—the missing parent, the aunt who failed, the telegram that never got thereisn't it rather a strain on anybody's powers of belief?"

"Is anything too improbable to happen?"

"No, nothing is too improbable to happen, but many things are too improbable to believe. That is why liars are so often believed—their imaginations fail to evolve anything so unlikely as the truth. That is why, if you had invented some plausible lie to tell Lord Windlesham, it would probably have sounded more convincing than the truth. What was the dinner like, by the way?"

"Oh, simply perfect! No one who didn't realise Adolphe's and Léontine's amazing powers of resource

could imagine---'

Nina wrung her hands. "Worse and worse!" she wailed.

"What do you mean?" Marica asked bewildered. "Why just what you said—no one could imagine the dinner would be so perfect if Lord Windlesham was really not expected."

Marica gave a little impatient shake of the shoulders. "What a vile world! Could anyone really think-

oh, have men no instinct?" she cried.

Nina shook her head.

"No, that's just it—they haven't. Men don't go by instinct, they go by the book—that's why they often go so far wrong. The book may be wildly out, you see! But they're trained to live by rule, to judge people by certain standards, and it's never dawned on them that most of their standards are all wrong, that it's not what we do, but what we are that matters Still he must believe in you, Marica," she went on earnestly, "no woman could know you and not realise that you're the driven snow-oh, if only you hadn't asked me to go with you to-night!"
"But why, Nina?"

"Because-I wasn't the right person-oh, don't you see? You ought to have produced some imposing relation to put everything right. Lady Plumpton for example!"

Marica gave a little shriek of mirth. "Oh, Nina, imagine Aunt Charlotte dining at a young man's rooms in St. James's Street! She would think it

perfectly abandoned."

But Nina did not smile, and when she turned and put her hand impulsively on Marica's the green eyes again were full of tears.

"Still, anything would have been better--"

But Marica cut her short with a light laugh.

"Oh, Nina, what does Captain Harding or anything else matter now I know that Tim cares for me? And he's told me so and he's coming to-morrow at four o'clock to see me and then-"

"And then," Nina said, smiling through her tears, "you are going to live happily ever after like the princess in the fairy story. And who wants that to happen more than I do?"

They had planned to lunch together next day at Prince's, to make the day go quicker, and it was past three when Marica went home to Blenheim Gardens. The drowsy summer afternoon wore on as she sat in the quiet drawing-room waiting for the appointed hour.

The hands of the clock crawled with tortoise tread towards four o'clock. Would that longed-for moment never come? When at last the clock of the old church at the end of the street rang out the four triumphal strokes she sat tense, expectant, her heart beating tumultuously, the pulses drumming in her ears. One two three four!

The hour had struck. At any moment now he

might be here! The hands of the clock crept slowly round its face. A quarter past . . . half past still no sound of footsteps on the stair. Was there anything so racking to the nervous system at waiting? It seemed to her just then as the worst part of the tragedy of woman's existence. Men need never wait; they could always act. Oh, the relief of doing some-

thing, to aid the march of time!

She sat down at the piano and tried to puzzle out the accompaniment of a song Nina had left upon the table-pausing between every few bars to catch the sound for which her ears were attuned. But her execution was too halting to serve as a vent to her pent-up feelings and she rose incontrollably and walking into the drawing-room looked out of the window. Down below the quiet street basked sleepily in the afternoon sunshine. Nice rosy-faced babies in frocks fresh from the wash-tub walked home with their nurses from the Park. The red-haired girls at the house opposite were shrieking each other's names on the doorstep preparatory to rushing out to tea. The smart woman at the corner, whose opulent outlines were miraculously confined by a cobweb gown of lace and chiffon sailed away in an open taxi-cab. Somewhere in the distance a piano organ droned the refrain from a popular song,

"Say not love is a dream! Say not that hope is vain!"

She walked abruptly away from the window, the words she had often heard, as she heard a hundred pretty meaningless refrains, seemed suddenly charged with sinister prophecy.

Five o'clock! What had happened?

Ah, there were footsteps now, but she knew they were only Denman's There were no others following in his wake.

"Shall I bring tea, m'm?" he asked quaveringly.

"Yes, yes!"

That would be doing something—even pouring out

tea that she could not drink, pretending to eat bread and butter. Denman arranged the table with his usual painstaking deliberation, breathing asthmatically as he attempted to light the flame beneath the tea kettle—there was something rather soothing in his slow movements.

"Denman, wasn't that the door-bell?" she asked,

sitting suddenly upright.

"I'll go and see, m'm," he said as he struck another match.

"Never mind about the kettle, Denman, I'll see to that!" she urged with nervous impatience.

The old man left the room at the rate of a mile an

hour.

She sat, still bolt upright, her head erect, every nerve strained to catch the sound of his slowly returning feet. Yes, here they were at last, followed this time by a firmer tread. All was well, she stood up with a laugh at her foolish fears, her eyes full of expectant joy. . . . The door opened.

"Mr. Davenant Hewetson!" Denman announced

hoarsely.

Her head swam. As "Josh" advanced smiling towards her she hardly saw him. Grasping the corner of the mantelpiece with one hand she looked blankly before her. Afterwards she could not have told what happened, she only knew that she must have shaken hands and maintained some appearance of sanity for a few minutes; later she found him sitting by her side on the sofa apparently unconcerned and conversing with his usual urbanity.

As one in a dream she poured out tea and made replies of some kind to his remarks; that they were wildly wide of the mark did not seem to trouble him. "Josh" was not wont to consider women in the light of conversationalists, and with an eye-glass fixed into his small pale eye he contemplated the charming vision at his side with smiling approval.

"It was quite an unexpected pleasure to meet you yesterday morning and to be honoured with such a

delightful smile of recognition, that I ventured to come and pay my respects in person."

"Oh, I see!" she murmured vaguely, helping her-

self for the third time to sugar.

"My mother," he went on impressively, "is giving a small thé dansant next week—quite the rage now, aren't they?—and we shall be delighted to see you.

"Thank you, but I expect to be going out of

London very soon."

"How too unfortunate! But I hope we are to have the pleasure of seeing you on your return to town. We are moving into our new house in Berkeley Square in the autumn."

"Really, how very delightful!" she answered in the intense voice of the woman who is not attending to a word that is said to her, whilst she wondered desperately: "If Tim arrived now what on earth was to be done with 'Josh'?"

"It doesn't do to leave these things to chance," Mr. Hewetson remarked, as he edged a little closer along the sofa. "I want to make quite sure of seeing

you!"

His face at this moment was so exactly like Humpty Dumpty's when he stretched out his hand to Alice from the top of the wall that Marica nearly gave vent to a peal of laughter. The smile into which her features were contorted in her effort to control the impulse encouraged "Josh" to further overtures.

"I don't know whether you are aware that I admire

you immensely!"

He nodded his head beaming impressively. At this moment "Josh" felt no small pride in his powers of discrimination. Hitherto he had always intended to marry some woman with a title, now he suddenly realised the tinsel value of such an appendage compared to the rarer attribute of distinction. Many "titled people"—as he would have described them—were of amazingly plebeian appearance, whilst this girl showed her breeding with every turn of her small head

and every movement of her lovely hands as they

moved amongst the tea-things.

Bending forward his usually resounding voice sank into an intimate key that filled her once more with the writhing sensation she had experienced before at this sort of love-making. She never knew how she put an end to the interview, by what remorseless methods she succeeded in battering even "Josh's" self-confidence to the dust, and driving him humbler than she could ever have believed he could become, towards her door.

As he turned dejectedly to leave her, he reminded her irresistibly of one of Pat Kilmurry's "dying boars" at the moment when their ample proportions were just beginning to shrink in the process of dissolution. Would "Josh" too, standing there with his plump hand on the door handle, continue to dwindle and finally collapse with an expiring squeak upon the carpet?

She held her breath to drive back the storm of conflicting emotions that threatened to overcome her, and not until the door had closed behind him did it

find its vent.

Nina Touraine, coming in five minutes later found a limp figure, stifling wild maniacal laughter, amongst the cushions on the sofa.

"Marica! Marica!" she cried, putting her hand on one slim, heaving shoulder. "What's the matter?"

Marica sat up and flung her arms round Nina. "What is it, darling?" Nina repeated in alarm. "Marica, what has happened? He came, didn't he? And it's all right?"

"Yes, dear," Marica cried wildly, "he came, and he adores me, and . . . he's just begged me to marry him—and so it's alright, isn't it? only——"

"Only what?"

"Only he happens to be—'Josh'! Congratulate me. darling!"

Meanwhile Captain Harding had spent a far from peaceful day—a day to which the little dinner of the evening before had formed an agitating prelude. For Marica had not been wrong in supposing that he found the party uncongenial, yet in reality he was suffering mainly from the state of mind common to other men of his profession when they find themselves in an unfamiliar social milieu. For the soldier detests nothing so much as to be a social pioneer. He will penetrate fearlessly into the heart of virgin forests and feast happily with Bambute pygmies in Central Africa, but he dreads to find himself at an unknown dinner-table, or with people in social circles outside his own. Whatever society he enters he likes it to be a familiar track, whether it leads through Mayfair or St. John's Wood.

With Nina Touraine, Captain Harding was comparatively happy, she was the sort of pretty amusing little woman one meets everywhere in London, the plaything of an hour, and who would probably never again enter into the scheme of things as he saw it.

But Marica Fayne? What was she? A woman who masqueraded under an assumed name at public balls, who went about with people quite outside the social pale, yet whose beauty, whose manners and conversation were precisely those of the women of his own world!

What was she? He could not place her! Yes, that was it! At last he had compressed into five words the whole cause of his hostility. He could not place her—and the fact filled him with dull resentment. The Englishman resents being mystified. The Frenchman, the American, or the Russian may adore the Sphinx-like woman who piques their curiosity by her elusiveness—the Englishman has no use for her whatever. His mind rebels at being confronted by a problem in feminine form. Even on the stage he prefers the woman he can take in at a glance, the bizarreries of Mistinguetts make no appeal to him, he likes the obvious charms of London choruses, made up of girls like pretty clergymen's daughters to soothe him with the jingling tunes

he has known and loved-under varying names-ever

since he was a boy.

Captain Harding was no rigid moralist, he regarded with equal toleration the ingenue or the demi-mondaine types both familiar to him since he left a preparatory school—provided only they kept to the rôles assigned them by destiny. But Marica Favne belonged to no type he had ever before encountered, and his whole soul rose in revolt. It is doubtful whether during the entire course of his career, since at the aforesaid preparatory school, he had crossed laboriously the pons asinorum Harding had ever passed through a period of such acute mental strain as the evening at Tim's rooms imposed on him. Marica Fayne was an enigma, and Tim, his greatest pal, was obviously and rapidly losing his heart to her! How was he to rescue Tim from the abvss into which he was slipping?

Somehow or other Harding had constituted himself Tim's guardian angel. For a young man as much in request as Tim, in modern London, such an attendant is of priceless worth, for to make one's appearance alone in public is to become the immediate prey of desperate hostesses, and Tim's unfailing courtesy made him particularly defenceless against any onslaught of this kind. He simply *could* not be rude to a woman! But Harding's stalwart presence at his side was calculated to strike a chill into the heart

of the most intrepid.

Ever since the days long ago when Tim had fagged for Harding at Eton, Fate had always thrown the two together. On leaving Sandhurst, Tim had followed Harding into the Guards; and from that time they had been inseparable. Yet in reality, beyond an interest in polo ponies, the two had probably hardly anything in common, and even on this point—had they realised it—they differed fundamentally. For Tim loved his polo ponies, as he loved all his animals, because they were his friends, whilst to Harding they were merely "mounts," to be

appreciated in exact proportion to their ability to

remain in close proximity to the ball.

In character as well the two friends were totally unlike-Tim was easy-going, warm-hearted and whimsical, Harding was shrewd, unemotional and matter-of-fact. But somehow, in spite of all these differences, they had formed a habit of frequenting each other's society; they were constantly to be seen together in the hunting field, in summer they went racing, dropped in at the theatres, foregathered at the club or walked up the Row in that silence, broken only by infrequent monosyllables, that seems mysteriously to satisfy the Englishman's need of companionship. The exchange of ideas and confidences that forms the basis of women's friendships is also too often the cause of their quarrels, but men may go about together for years and know almost nothing of each other's thoughts or feelings. Nor do they want to know!

When Harding went round next morning to the stables where they both kept their ponies, he found Tim already there feeding his favourite pony with carrots.

"Hullo, Tim!"

"Hullo."

"Jolly day."
"Topping."

Silence followed, broken only by the appreciative chumping of the pony.

"Darling old girl!" said Tim, and kissing her white velvet nose, he walked out of the stall.

"Tim!"

"What is it?"

"Feel like a practice game this afternoon at Ranelagh?"

"No," said Tim shortly.

"Several of the fellows were talking about it—couldn't you manage to come?"

"No, I couldn't—I'm busy." Tim had never been too busy for polo before!

Harding looked at him with a gloomy eye. It was just as he had feared. Tim was going to see Miss Fayne this afternoon. At all costs he must be prevented. Harding, watching his retreating figure as he walked out of the yard, realised that this time Tim had got the bit between his teeth and he, Harding, was powerless to stop him. The only thing was to give the alarm to his family at once.

Hailing a taxi, Harding drove off hastily to Lady Windlesham's house in Eaton Place, only to be met with the news that "her ladyship had gone down to Merewater for a few days." Tim's sister, Lady Wavertree, however, was still in London and Harding

hurried on to Charles Street.

Lady Wavertree was resting on the low divan in the corner of her boudoir, when the maid came to announce that Captain Harding had called. She had given orders that she could see no one before lunch time and was lying back on the silk cushions of the couch, with half-shut eyes of dreamy contentment.

Everything about her was reposeful—the soft clinging gown she wore, the soothing grey of the wall-paper and curtains, the languorous smell of the huge bowls of roses, the subdued golden half-light that

glimmered through the drawn linen blinds.

Claire Wavertree had succeeded in reducing the stress of life to a minimum. For though it was now the thick of the season and she was always to be seen at "everything," she was one of the fortunate people whom society will have on any terms and who was therefore able to escape the drudgery of those whose footing in it is less secure. She had never known any of the perplexities or anxieties of the people who have to hold their own in the fray. At nineteen, when she had just embarked on her second season, after two years of unbroken successes, she found herself engaged to Lord Wavertree, a dull man of thirty-five, with an enormous income. To marry him seemed quite as simple as going for a ride in the Row, and they were so seldom alone together afterwards that she never had

time to be bored with him. Her health was perfect and at thirty-five she was outwardly as lovely and

inwardly as light-hearted as at eighteen.

On this drowsy morning in June, the world seemed more than ever a pleasant place, and she lay back on the divan, bathing in the beauty of life, when suddenly a light tap sounded on the door.

"What is it?" she called gently, bringing her mind down to earth like a kite that has sailed heaven-

wards.

"It is Marker, milady."

"Come in, Marker!" And as the maid advanced timidly into the room, she added without a trace of irritation in her voice: "You know I said I was not to be disturbed till lunch time!"

"I'm sure I'm very sorry, milady, but Captain Harding has called and says he must see your ladyship at once on urgent business."

Lady Wavertree sat upright hastily and all the serenity induced by her pleasant thoughts left her face.

"Captain Harding? Ah—show him in at once. It must be something about Tim!" she added to herself with a sudden throbbing at her heart, as the maid left the room and she sat with pale cheeks waiting to know the worst.

The only moments in all Claire's smooth-running career when she had ever felt her peace of mind disturbed, were those connected with her brother. Tim was the one being in the world—not excepting her satisfactory cherub at Eton—whom she worshipped whole-heartedly, and the thought of any harm coming to him turned her sick with apprehension.

"Don't say Tim has had an accident! It's that horrid polo!" she cried, with a little break in her voice as Harding, with tragedy written in every line of his face, came into the room.

"No, no," he said, sitting down heavily, and fixing his prominent brown eyes on the carpet, "it's nothing

of that kind. I'm glad to say Tim's quite fit and well, but-er-the fact is, he's in one of his entanglements again."

The rose colour that had ebbed away from Claire's smooth cheeks, flew back again at this assurance, but

her eyes were still full of anxiety.

Claire knew too well the dangers of Tim's charming nature. He "had a way with him" which was fatally fascinating to women, but unlike the traditional gay Lothario, he was always full of regret for the havoc he had wrought. Claire could remember so many young things whose hearts Tim's charming understanding smile had caused to flutter and whose modesty alone had been their undoing! Tim, simple darling that he was, never dreamt that they would like to marry him! One discerning divorcée-quite an impossible person, Claire understood her to be!-who in return for some trifling kindness, bombarded Tim with invitations to tête-àtête dinners, had ended by bursting into tears on his shoulder, whereupon Tim immediately agreed to marry her, and would have done so if the influenza bacillus had not intervened by removing her from his path. Tim was so dreadfully warm-hearted, so much too chivalrous for the capable women of his day!

"Oh, Tinker, who is it this time?" Claire asked

anxiously.

"Well," Captain Harding said slowly, "that's the difficulty. I really don't know who she is!"

"Not an actress? Not a musical comedy star?" and Claire's voice rose in an ascending scale of agitation.

"Good Lord, no! Tim's never shown any tendency

of that kind!"

Claire nodded. "Of course, he's too fastidious. And too fond of Mother!" she added gently. "What is her name?" she asked, after a pause.

"Her name is Fayne."

"Mrs. Fayne?"

"Oh, no, Miss Fayne. At least that is what she calls herself now-at first she gave her name as Mrs. Maxwell."

"It sounds very queer. Where did Tim meet

her?"

"At a Covent Garden ball."

"Heavens! Was she there alone?"

"I believe she said she was with a party, but we never saw them."

"Ah, you were there too?"

"Oh, yes, I was with Tim when she-well, spoke to him."

"Spoke to him?" Lady Wavertree asked with

growing horror.

"She called out his name—'Tim!' Evidently

knew him by sight, you see."

Lady Wavertree got up incontrollably and stood looking down on Harding, her blue eyes full of distress.

"Oh, but Tinker, how dreadful! She must be

simply a designing adventuress."
"Looks like it!" Harding agreed gloomily.

Of course any man of the world, he reflected, would take that view of the matter. Tim was the sort of person "everybody" knew by sight and there was nothing easier for a woman, who wanted to make his acquaintance, than to track him down at Covent Garden and accost him under cover of a mask and domino. Miss Fayne, it was true, was certainly unlike his conception of an adventuress, still there was no knowing-women were proverbially deceptive!

"Where does Miss-ah?"

"Favne."

"Miss Fayne live?" asked Lady Wavertree.

"Oh, somewhere in the wilds of Kensington."

"Alone?"

"As far as I could gather from what Tim told me, the other inhabitants of the house consist of a French maid, a mongrel terrier and a chef rather better than Escoffier. There is suposed to be a father in the background, but she never seemed able to

produce him!"

"It all sounds as queer as possible. Oh, Tinker, it must be stopped, we can't let Tim marry this impossible person. But are you sure he cares for her—in that way?"

"I feel sure he means to ask her to marry him."

"And then he may come to his senses and get involved in some horrid breach of promise action. I only hope she's got nothing written!"

"Tim doesn't easily put pen to paper."

Claire smiled. "No, he's a wretched correspondent."

She sank down again to the sofa and sat thinking

deeply.

"Oh, Tinker!" she said at last, "we have got to rescue Tim! We simply can't let him throw himself away like this. We've got to stop him—oh, whatever we do, we've got to stop him!" Harding looked at her admiringly. Her blue eyes

Harding looked at her admiringly. Her blue eyes were dreamy no longer now, but lit with an angry fire, her pretty, soft features had set into hard lines of

determination.

"Listen, Tinker," she said, leaning forward eagerly, "I see what we've got to do. I'm going to send Tim a line at once to say Mama is ill and that he must go to her at Merewater immediately."

"You think that Lady Windlesham will-"

"Play up? Oh, yes, she'd do anything to save Tim from a mésalliance! You know how she adores him! I will wire to her to have a heart attack immediately—and by the time Tim arrives, she can be in bed and Dr. Scott in attendance. It's all quite simple. Where shall I address the note? To Tim's rooms?"

"No, to the club. He's sure to lunch there."

She took up a pen and wrote rapidly in her large, irregular handwriting, talking all the time.

"Oh, Tinker!" she said plaintively, "isn't it all

maddening? What wouldn't I give to hear Tim was engaged to some nice girl who'd appreciate him -some one pretty and clever, just as he'd like, and with a little money of her own-"

"Yes, I know, it'd be a weight off all our minds!"

said Harding sympathetically.

Personally he was tired enough of his rôle of guardian angel and it would be an immense relief to see Tim safely settled and beyond the reach of all

designs on his affections.

"I'll have this sent to the club," Claire said, getting up from the writing-table and fastening down the flap of the envelope. "And you must go there to and keep guard over Tim. Don't let him out of your sight till he starts for St. Pancras. And above all, don't let him commit himself on paper." She held out her hand with a smile. "Ah, Tinker, what a lot we owe you!"

"I'm awfully fond of Tim!" Harding answered gruffly, growing suddenly red in the face—a sure sign with him, Claire knew, of deep emotion. And then with a hasty hand-shake he set forth on his mission.

Tim was sitting at lunch as Harding entered the dining-room of the club, peacefully ending up the meal with strawberries and cream, when a note was handed to him by the Club porter. Tim tore it open and a look of consternation broke over his pleasant features. Then he got up hastily and strode out of the room.

Harding followed him into the reading-room, where Tim sat down at a table and drew a sheet of paper towards him.

"Tim!" Harding said, putting his hand on his friend's shoulder, "is anything up?"

"Yes," Tim said, looking up with a white face, "my mother's ill. I'm going to her at once."

Harding's hand dropped. Sitting down on a chair near Tim's, he took out a cigarette and lit it in silence.

Tim seized a pen hastily and began to write.

Harding watched him with sinking heart. He felt sure the letter was for Miss Fayne. What was to be done? Had they driven Tim to the worst indiscretion of all-that of making a proposal of marriage in writing? For some moments Tinker sat lost in frenzied meditation. Then suddenly an impulse came to him to break the habits of a lifetime and "have it out."

"Tim," he said, leaning forward and speaking hoarsely, "for God's sake, old chap, don't do it in writing!"

"Do what in writing?" Tim asked shortly.

"Ask Miss Fayne to marry you."
"And why the devil not?" said Tim, continuing to write.

"Because, old fellow—I say y'know, I'm no good at talking, but you simply can't, Tim! Think of it all—Mrs. Sherwood—Covent Garden—assumed name —ghastly crowd she was with at Ascot-father apparently a myth—never met her anywhere—oh! I say, old chap, you really can't do it!"

Tim had finished the letter and fastening it down,

he turned with blazing eyes to Harding.

"Look here, Tinker," he said in a voice that shook with angry determination, "understand once and for all that I don't care a d—— who or what she is, what her relations are like or the people she goes about with! I love her, and if she'll have me, by Jove, I'm going to marry her!"

Then turning on his heel, he left Harding sitting in enpurpled silence, and walked out of the room.

What was to be done? The fatal words were written-irrevocably written and the letter had been given—to whom? After a few moments of the acutest mental strain Harding had ever experienced, he came to a decision. Tim, he told himself, was madsuffering from an attack of temporary mental aberration and was therefore not to be looked upon as responsible for what he did. It was the duty, the solemn duty of his friends to prevent him suffering

from the consequences of his actions. Later on when, as Claire Wavertree had put it, he returned to his senses he would thank them for coming to his rescue and saving him from himself.

Harding got up abruptly and walked into the hall.

"Has Lord Windlesham's note been sent off?" he asked the hall porter.

"Yes, sir, just started."
"Call me a taxi at once."

The next moment he was speeding swiftly in the direction of Knightsbridge. The cleverest woman he knew lived in a little row of houses close to Prince's Skating Club—a lady whose powers of resource alone triumphed over the narrow limits of her bank balance.

She was sipping Turkish coffee in the tiny drawing-

room when Harding was announced.

"Lina," he said, sitting down beside her, "would a hundred pounds be any use to you just at present?"

And in response to the eager light in her eyes, he proceeded to unfold his scheme.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE next day Marica, coming down to breakfast after an almost sleepless night, found no letter from Tim, as she had vainly hoped, awaiting her. Only, as she glanced abstractedly at the *Morning Post* a brief announcement met her eyes: "The Earl of Windlesham left London yesterday afternoon for Merewater Park, Midshire."

That was all! What did it mean? Why had he

never come, never written?

All day long, as she waited with nerves at snapping point for the ringing of the door bell or the postman's knock that would bring some explanation, and all the following night as again she lay awake staring with wide-open eyes into the darkness, the same questions kept up a dreary undercurrent in her brain.

Why had Tim left her? Why had he vanished like this out of her life—without a word, without a

sign?

Not until a week after the fateful Saturday did anything occur to throw a ray of light on to the mystery. She was sitting in the drawing-room with Nina, when Denman entered, and clearing his throat several times, remarked slowly:

"Excuse me, mum, but I've been meaning for some

days to mention that a lady called to see you."

"A lady?" Marica asked, without interest. "When, Denman?"

The old man stood in silence ruminating.

"Well, mum," he said at last, "I don't know that I can rightly remember, but I think it must have been about a week ago. Why, yes, mum," he added, with a sudden gleam of recollection, "it was one day you lunched out, and a messenger boy brought a note for you."

"A week ago? A note? But, Denman, I don't remember getting a note—sent by messenger, I

mean."

"Well, mum, a boy brought one and I left it on the hall-table. Last Saturday it was, I remember now, mum. And then just after that half-an-hour as it might be-a lady called to see you. I said you was out. She didn't give no name, and she asked for a piece of note-paper to write down a message for you, but when I brought it down she was gone."
"But Denman," Marica cried, sitting bolt upright,

"didn't that strike you as very extraordinary?"

Denman rubbed his chin. "Well, mum, I must say it did seem a bit odd. But I just thought the lady must have changed her mind about writing-"

"Oh, but don't you see?" Marica cried, "she must have taken the note with her. There was no note on

the table when I came in on Saturday."

Denman looked bewildered. "I'm sure I never thought of that, mum. She seemed such a pleasant spoken ladv---''

"What was she like to look at?"

"I couldn't rightly say. She wore a thick veil, you see, mum. Too thick to see through, so to speak."

Nina gave a little shriek of excitement.

"Oh, Marica, it's all too extraordinary. A mysterious note—a veiled lady—just like a Daily Mail feuilleton!"

"But, Denman," Marica cried, "why did you never

tell me all this before?"

"I'm sure I'm very sorry, mum, but somehow it seemed to slip my memory—what with the manuscrip' that Mr. Fayne lost this week, through Sarah's tidyings, though many's the time I've told her not on no account to hinterfere with Mr. Fayne's things, and then the dawg carrying off the bit of mummy bone as Mr. Fayne set such store by-"

"Yes, I know-the bit of mummied cat. Balzac

seemed to fancy it for his supper!"

He had buried it, she remembered, triumphantly at the bottom of the garden for future consumption, as if three thousand years of interment had not already mellowed it to the right pitch of excellence! Thank God for the glorious flashes of humour that run like golden threads through the blackest hours of life! thought Marica, dismissing Denman with a quivering smile. The poor old man was not to blame, she knew. He could not possibly guess that he was playing an unwilling part in an intrigue that, as Nina said, savoured more of a Daily Mail romance than of everyday life.

"Nina, what can it mean?" she asked, turning to her friend when Denman had shuffled out of hearing. Nina did not answer for a moment, but the clear

green eyes reflected a brain hot on the trail of speculation.

"Of course," she said at last, "Captain Harding is at the bottom of this. But you must write to Lord Windlesham and tell him what has happened!"

Marica shook her head emphatically. "Oh, no, no! For one thing we can't be certain that the letter was from him. There may be some quite simple explanation—a letter brought to the wrong house, or something of that kind. I can't write to him and say: 'A veiled lady called at this house a week ago and took away your letter,' when perhaps he never wrote at all. And if he really cares he'll write again or come." She tilted her chin higher. "Anyhow, I won't move a finger to bring him back," she added firmly.

"But why?"

"Because I should never know a happy moment if I felt I'd manoeuvred—struggled to keep him."

"My poor child! How many marriages would there be in London if every woman said that?"

"But what feeling can a man have for a woman who has annexed him?" she cried hotly.

Nina gave a light laugh. "Feelings of the profoundest respect, dear. The Englishman always

admires the successful *shikarri*, even when he is himself the game. And, besides, once a thing has become his own it doesn't occur to him to criticise it. He doesn't criticise his wife just as he doesn't criticise his portmanteau. 'My wife!' 'My portmanteau!'—it doesn't matter whether it came from Harrod's or the Stores, it's his, and therefore the one really sensible portmanteau in the world. And it's the same with his wife—once she has succeeded in marrying him he's just as proud of her as if he'd gone through fire and flood to win her."

Marica nodded. "That's where society mothers are so wise—they know it doesn't really matter how they achieve their ends—their methods are so soon forgotten! But one must be brought up to it to feel like that. I couldn't." She gave a little shudder.

"You'd let pride ruin your life?"

"I don't know that it's altogether pride. I rather think it's a sort of superstition. I don't believe in forcing the hand of Fate. 'The things that are for thee gravitate to thee.' And somehow I feel that if I tried to get Tim back, it would spoil everything. It was the way he seemed to feel we were meant for each other that was so lovely. And if he doesn't feel that now'—for the first time her eyes filled with tears—"Oh, Nina, I must give him up and try to forget!"

Suddenly she saw to her surprise that Nina's eyes

were full of tears too.

"Darling, it can't be as hopeless as all that!" Nina said brokenly, and then getting up and moving restlessly across the room, she went on: "Oh, Marica, you don't know how I feel about all this. It was I who helped you to leave the Sheep Track, it was on my account you quarrelled with Lady Grundisburgh."

"If I hadn't left the Sheep Track I should never

have met Tim at all!"

"No, that's true!" said Nina brightening. "But still I feel that—well, anyhow, I've done all I could!

Marica," she said suddenly, grasping the girl's hands in hers, "if you knew everything—"

"Everything?"

"I can't tell you now. But later on you'll know, you'll understand that I did the only thing possible, and if it wasn't any use-"

"Nina, tell me what has happened?"

"No, not yet, not yet."

And then she abruptly changed the subject.

Marica said that she must try to forget! but what woman has ever succeeded in carrying out that futile resolution? As long as she remained in London, she knew in her heart it would be impossible. For as the days went on, the wild hope of meeting him when she went out gave way to a dread of such an encounter. She knew that he could not care for her any longer, and to see him would be an agony she simply could not endure. And so, on her walks she kept rigorously to Kensington and avoided every place where she might be likely to come across him.

It was almost the last Sunday of the season, a hot evening in July, when Mr. Fayne proposed going to sit in the Park under the shade of the trees. secluded corners, where Papa usually elected to sit, were safe enough, she reflected, and they started out together. But to-day an unusual energy seemed to possess her father, for he strode onwards through Kensington Gardens and along the Serpentine and would not be lured into any of the by-paths they

passed on their way.
"No, dear child," he said, "crowds amuse you, I know. We will go to the other side of the Park."

"But crowds don't amuse me as they used to do,

He shook his head incredulously and walked on with a smile.

"Let us sit down here, my love!" he said, at last, pointing to a couple of green chairs on the grass just

opposite Stanhope Gate. "This will be delightfully cool and peaceful—there are not too many people here and you can still amuse yourself watching the crowd from a distance."

He was in one of his dreamiest moods this evening. For the last week he had been engaged on the translation of an Ethiopic poem, and now, sitting here in the cool of the evening, Marica could see his lips moving rhythmically as he sought inspiration from the summer air. Though in theory he detested crowds, he had the faculty for closing his ears to all disturbing sounds, and when a party of smart young men in morning coats came and encamped on the row of chairs just in front of him, he scarcely appeared to notice their arrival.

They were all talking in loud, cheerful voices, and after a while, Marica began to find them quite amusing. Their frank, outspoken remarks about the passers-by who might, for all they knew, be her own brothers, aunts, or cousins, were characteristic of their type—the type to whom the people outside their own circle have no existence. And the fact that an old man and a girl, whom they had never seen before, were sitting just behind them, served as no check on their conversation—if indeed, they realised it at all.

"I say, there goes Erdington, as usual looking out for acquaintances. Ah, he's spotted Sergeant Sue, but she's not taking any. Who's that pretty girl over there? Met her somewhere the other day? Connie Binford's new heiress? . . . Well, go in and win, old man, we'll all wish you luck! . . . Oh, what I say is, if I marry for money, I want fids and fids of it—a little isn't worth it!" . . .

Suddenly one of them leant along the row and asked loudly: "I say, any of you fellows seen old Tim lately?"

Marica's heart stood still. She knew instinctively that Lord Windlesham was the "Tim" referred to.

"No," a cheery voice answered, "Tim's down in

the country. Poor old Tinker's been having no end of a time with him."

"What sort of a time?"

"Didn't you hear about it?"
No. What?"

The voice sank lower and now only stray sentences were audible.

".... met her at Covent Garden, and went off his head about her yes, bar jokes . . . swore he'd marry her Tinker had the devil of a job riding him off!"

Marica sat bolt upright, her heart beating wildly. She longed, yet dreaded, to hear more, and suddenly

turning to her father she said in a low voice:

"Papa, let us move away from here. Don't you think it looks nicer under that tree?" She jerked her head vaguely at a sycamore a little distance off.

Mr. Fayne smiled gently. "Why so restless, dear

child? It is very pleasant where we are!"

She sank back in her chair vanguished. There was nothing for it but to sit on here, an unwilling listener to such fragments of the conversation as reached her ears.

"Of course—quite impossible Who? The Covent Garden lady? Oh, no one anybody had ever met anywhere went about with a queer crowd, Mrs. Temperley and her lot! . . . to the Midnight Club and shows of that kind!"

"Mrs. Temperley!" The speaker raised his

eyebrows and gave a low whistle.

"Yes, that would be about the limit!" said a cheerful voice at the end of the row.

"What I say is!" another one remarked heartily, "if I've got to marry, give me a girl that knows the ropes! No dark horses for me. A girl I know all about—that's the girl to marry—

A chorus of approval greeted this profound sentiment, and then the conversation turned on the more absorbing topic of polo ponies.

Marica felt as though she were in the hottest room of a Turkish bath. A wave of horror swept over her. She longed for the lime trees overhead to fall and crush her.

The Covent Garden lady!-that was herself-Papa's daughter! Poor Papa, what would he say if he knew? Gradually she began to understand all that had happened—Captain Harding's suspicions . . . Tim's sudden defection she was 'impossible.' Her cheeks flamed at the adjective. She had "gone about with a queer crowd!" Why were they queer-these cheery, easy-going people? And Maisie Temperley—what was wrong with her? Why was she "the limit"? Why should her name be greeted with raised eyebrows and that meaning whistle? And Covent Garden? Why was it so "impossible" to go to Covent Garden? After all, lots of people went there for a lark! Cynthia Brinton was there and Cynthia was in the smartest set in London! And then suddenly Lord Charles Thane's words of wisdom came back to her: "Smash the decalogue to bits, but stick to the conventions Go where you like, do what you like, but with the right people!"
Cynthia had gone to Covent Garden, but she had gone with Lady Bembridge, whilst she, Marica, had been there with "a queer crowd," with a woman who was "the limit"! That was just the difference!

She longed to go and talk to Nina, but Nina was out of town for a week, staying with her grandmother at Netherbourne, she had told Marica. Did Nina know what was wrong with Maisie? Did she dream that she was regarded as "the limit"?

In vain all the next day these questions repeated themselves in her brain, and then when she came in at tea-time that afternoon, Denman announced that Mrs. Temperley herself was waiting in the drawing-room to see her. She walked upstairs, nerving herself to greet Maisie with undiminished cordiality. Maisie must not see that she had heard anything about her

. . she entered the room and held out her hand with a smile.

But Maisie kept her own rigidly at her side and stared at Marica with flaming blue eyes. The girl stepped back and looked at her in surprise. What was the matter with Maisie? Her face was crimson and she was breathing hard in short, quick gasps, like someone who has been running.

"So here you are at last!" she panted, after a moment, during which Marica gazed at her in

paralysed silence.

"Maisie, what on earth is the matter?" she asked

at last, faintly.

"The matter? What's the good of pretending you don't know? I've just met Teddy Touraine and he's told me everything!"

"Teddy Touraine? Captain Touraine—Nina's husband? But what did he tell you?"

"About Josh Hewetson coming here, of course! Teddy saw him on your doorstep a fortnight ago, he saw him come into the house and then he waited. And he saw Nina come in later."

"Well, what then?"

"What then?" Maisie's voice rose to a scream. "What right have you or Nina to Josh Hewetson, I should like to know! You knew he was mine, mine! How dared you take him from me!"

"Take him from you? 'Josh'!" Marica leant back against the mantelpiece and broke into a derisive little peal of laughter. This was really too funny! She was accused of stealing "Josh's" affections!
"Really, Maisie, this is too absurd! You can't

imagine that I have designs on 'Josh'! 'Josh'! Good Lord! if he was the last man in the world—"

"Then!" Maisie interrupted quickly, "if it wasn't you if was Nina. I thought all along it was probably Nina. And you let her use your house as a rendez-vous. You arranged for 'Josh' to come here and meet her. He's never spoken to me since that day! And it's all your doing, I tell you! He was mine. before, and you've helped Nina to take him from me!"

"Maisie!" Marica cried, recovering her presence of mind and holding up her hand to stem the torrent. "I'm not going to listen to any more of this nonsense. Mr. Hewetson isn't anybody's! You're married! Nina's married! And I—don't want him!"

Maisie gave a bitter laugh. "Oh, what's the good of posing as a moralist? We all find our pleasures where we can and you're no better than the rest of us—except that you've got plenty of money so you can pick and choose!—you! a girl who dances with men she doesn't know, who makes friends with Leila Sherwood, with Lord Charles Thane, one of the most notorious rips in London! Oh, yes, you manage to put in a good time, my virtuous Sainte Nitouche! And as to Nina!—Nina, who'll take presents from anyone, a divorcée—"

Marica went white to the lips. "Stop, Maisie, what do you mean?"

Maisie paused and drew a deep breath. "You don't mean to, say you really didn't know that Nina was divorced from her husband?"

Marica took a firm hold of the mantelpiece—the room was spinning round. "Nina—divorced—divorced—" she repeated faintly.

"Yes. The case went undefended."

"I don't believe it!"

The words rang out in a voice so strangely unlike her own that Marica found herself wondering vaguely who had uttered them. A horrible unreal feeling came over her—this was not true, only some wild dream from which she would awake. And then she heard that same strange voice, over which she had no control whatever, cry angrily: "It's all a lie—a horrible lie that you've invented to put me against Nina!"

"If you think that, I'll send you the newspaper cutting. Nina's no paragon of virtue, I can tell you. Ask her who gave her the pearls she wears, the

diamond heart she says her grandmother sent her-I

tell you she's a---'

Marica put her hands over her ears whilst a volley of invective poured from Maisie's lips. The harridan which ever lurks at the back of every wanton—whether professed or otherwise—the shrieking woman of the streets with uplifted fist and bonnet on one side, always ready to spring in self-defence from behind the smiling front of the woman who can be bought, rushed to the fore. It was a hideous moment. Words Marica had never heard before, hurtled through the air, as she stood, leaning, faint and sick, against the mantelpiece. She remembered dully that she had thought Maisie looked like a Madonna—now she was like a wild beast fighting for her prey—for "Josh" and the money she had failed to capture.

Still raving confusedly, she moved towards the door—opened it, swirled out. As she went down the staircase, Marica still could hear the sound of disjointed invective, till with the banging of the front

door, there fell a sudden grateful silence.

Marica sank on to her knees on the floor and hid her face in her hands.

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The summer twilight faded, and still she remained motionless, kneeling by the sofa, her face buried in her arms, unconscious of the flight of time. Her powers of thought seemed paralysed; she felt as if she were living in a nightmare with some horrible, unseen thing close to her, but at which she dared not look. And then gradually the fragmentary sentences of Maisie's tirade came back to her—"we all find our pleasures where we can . . . you're no more virtuous than the rest of us" Now at last she understood! These people, who had all seemed so kind and pleasant, who had made her so welcome in their midst, were capable of unspeakable things—things that hitherto had never come within her field of consciousness. It was as if a flashlight had suddenly been turned on to the last two years of her life,

illumining every corner, that till now had been shrouded in mystery. She remembered the strange incident of Mrs. Sherwood and her "salon," the men of the world collected round her tea-table. Lord Charles Thane's warnings then the moments when she had felt "out of it" in Nina's circle, when they had seemed constrained, gênés by her presence their inexplicable predilection for people like van Boemen, Schlinkenheim, "Josh".... the remarks of the young men in the Park—"Mrs. Temperley"... and that meaning whistle! And Nina herself-dear, lovely, kind, little Nina, a woman who "took presents"—a divorceé! Ah, that was the worst of all—that she had kept it from her, from Marica, letting her think that she and her husband had parted from a mere matter of incompatibility! Nina had lied to her, deceived her! Ah, what a fool, what a blind fool she had been! This was the result of bringing up a girl to "contemplate beauty "! of keeping away from her everything that could mar her conception of the beautiful—golliwogs and pottery dragons and inartistic dolls' houses. But life itself was full of these things—it teemed with golliwogs! And unless one was able, when a girl grew up, to keep away the golliwogs of life, surely it would be better to accustom her to them in her childhood before she was old enough to feel the shock! As it was, she had grown up to hate what was ugly, to shut her eyes to it, just as long ago she had been taught to shut her eyes to the blue and yellow dragons of the chocolate maker's villa. She had learnt to go through the world in blinkers, to see nothing of its sordidness. And now all at once the blinkers had been torn off and life in all its tawdry ugliness thrust on her sight!

The twilight deepened; still she did not move. Once she was vaguely conscious that Denman had padded into the room and announced huskily that Mr. Fayne would not be home till late and that dinner awaited her below. But the mere thought of food was

nauseating, and she had waved him away and sat on still, dry-mouthed, dry-eyed, staring at the fading light in the little garden outside the windows.

Suddenly she felt she could bear it no more, and

she rose incontrollably to her feet.

"I must talk to somebody or I shall go mad!" she cried and fled out of the room.

Ten o'clock had just rung out from the clocks of Westminster as Peter Trent pushed away his legal papers and walked across to the fireplace to fetch a pipe for a last smoke before going to bed. As he stretched out his arms towards the pipe-rack, a little group of Japanese gods he had collected on his travels, and which now stood huddled together on the mantelpiece, confronted him. They were all there, these friendly genii, merry Daikoko, reflective Dharma, Hôtei, the bon vivant, and Jiro-Jin, the benevolent, who at a touch on his flowing beard, nodded his conical head, whilst his small, black eyes twinkled with bonhomie and his smiling mouth seemed to utter blessings. Peter, as was his wont, set the portentous head wagging and smiled back at him. As he did so, he caught a sudden glimpse of his own features in the glass behind the head of Jiro-Jin. Pausing, a plug of tobacco in his hand, he contemplated for a moment his physiognomy—his pale skin wrinkled by much thought and a little laughter into a hundred lines round the eyes and mouth, the eyes themselves small and expressionless, the mouth hard and forbidding. He did not know since he had never cause to smile at his own reflection—that when he did smile, these same eyes lit up, as Marica had noticed, with an electric flash of understanding and the same straight lips parted to disclose the strong, white teeth that are probably a man's greatest aid to attractiveness. He was worse than an ugly man, he told himself—he had a face that said nothing.

"Anything further removed from a girl's idea of a

hero of romance it would be impossible to imagine!" he thought, turning away, with a grim smile, from the mirror.

No wonder Marica had never thought of him in that light-Marica, brought up to worship beauty, Marica with her dreams and ideals! No wonder she had found her affinities in a world that held gaver people than himself—a world that filled him with a weary boredom, yet which he understood was necessary to the present phase of Marica's evolution. Once in her life, he had told himself, a woman must have her fling, must have her share of revelling, of thoughtlessness and pleasure, if she is to be any use in the world later. And Marica was one of the women who had got to live, who would never be satisfied to leave the feast of life untasted. So he had stood aside, leaving her to work out her inevitable destiny. During the last year he had gone seldom to the little house in Blenheim Gardens, and then only when she was alone. Of the world she moved in he knew nothing beyond what she told him, until suddenly a fortnight ago he had come upon the Touraine divorce-case in the law reports. Nina Touraine, he knew, was Marica's greatest friend, and then, as he read, he realised with a feeling of sick horror the *milieu* into which he had drifted. had been heard in camera and detailed reports in the newspapers suppressed, but the facts of the decree nisi and an undefended case were enough. Marica feel about it? How far had she known the real character of the woman she had made her intime? Twice Peter had gone to see her during the last fortnight, each time to be told that Miss Fayne was out, nor did she even write afterwards to express regret at having missed him. Where was she to-night? he wondered, as he leant back, watching the smoke rings from his pipe wreathing upwards to the ceiling. Suddenly the front door-bell rang. A murmured altercation followed in the small hall outside the door. and there came to his ears an unaccustomed soundthe swish of a woman's dress. For a moment he stood motionless, listening; then the door opened.

"Marica!" he cried, startled into the use of her name and going to meet her as she came towards him, holding out two trembling hands, whilst despair looked out of her eyes. How changed she was!

"What is it?" he asked gently, as he took her hands in his.

She did not answer, but sank down on to the chair he pushed forward for her, and the long Chinese coat she wore slipped off her shoulders, disclosing the slim lines of her figure. She was dressed in a thin summer frock of misty blue crêpe de chine, cut low in the front to show her round, white neck with its encircling pearls. And as she sat there, she looked at him silently with a ship-wrecked face that cut him to the heart.

He longed to be able to kneel beside her, to hold her little, fragile, sensitive hands again in his, and comfort her. But a sort of rigidity prevented him—he could not break through his habitual self-control all at once. It is the emotion of the moment, not the deep abiding hunger of the soul that is easily expressed by a gentle word or a caressing touch.

"You are ill," he said suddenly, looking into her small pale face.

She shook her head. "I don't think so."

"Have you had any dinner?" he asked with sudden inspiration.

She shook her head again.

Peter made no reply, but crossed the room to the small table on which a copper cafetière stood always at hand. It was a habit of his to make his own coffee—no one could do it to suit him—and he set about the operation with a practised hand. Marica sat watching him in silence, and when he brought the cup of perfect café noir across to her, she accepted it with a trembling smile of thanks. The potion, rendered still more stimulating by the dash of liqueur brandy he had

slipped surreptitiously into it, brought a little colour to her cheeks.

"What must you think of me," she said, at last, putting down the empty cup, "coming to you like

"You came because you were in trouble. You were

right."

'Yes," she cried feverishly, "do you remember once saying that if ever I was in trouble, I was to send for you? Well, I've come to you instead—that's all— I felt I must come to you to-night-that I should go mad if I had to sit alone any longer with my thoughts."

"Can't you manage to tell me what's the matter?"
"It's the end of everything!" she cried brokenly,

and then suddenly burying her face in her hands, she

broke into a passion of weeping.

The man, standing silent at her side, knew better than to attempt to check the storm of grief that shook her; only when at last she looked up through her tears and held out her hand to him, he took it gently in his and repeated: "Won't you tell me all about it?"

"Yes," she said, dabbing her eyes with a damp ball of lace-edged handkerchief. And in the same small, tired voice she told him, brokenly, her story, her meeting with Tim at the ball, the fortnight of wild happiness in June, and then the sudden debacle-Tim's defection, the conversation of the young men in the Park, and lastly the frightful scene with Maisie this afternoon.

"And these people were my friends!" she cried, "I was one of them—one of the 'queer crowd'! Tell me," she cried suddenly, "did you know about

Nina Touraine?"

He nodded.

"And never told me?"

"I thought you knew. I came twice to see you, but you were out "

She saw the wince of pain that crossed his features, and a sharp pang of self-reproach went through her—

how had she treated him—this friend who never failed her, who, the moment he guessed she was in trouble, had hurried to her side, whilst she had no thoughts for anyone but Tim? For the first time she realised that Peter loved her. Yet it was Tim she loved, Tim whose memory she could not tear from her heart, Tim who alone of all men had the power to thrill her!

"Peter," she cried brokenly, "what a good friend you have always been to me! If only Tim had

understood, as you did---''

Peter rose incontrollably and began to pace the

room with restless footsteps.

"It's monstrous!" he broke out with sudden anger. "The man who could have rescued you, have taken you out of it all—to have failed you! It's unbelievable that any man could be such a fool—so blind to his own good. Oh, my dear," and he came swiftly across the room and sat down beside her, "it must come all right in the end! No man could love you and let you go. No other woman could ever satisfy a man who had cared for you, Marica! He must come back to you and all will be well!"

"No, Peter!" she said quickly, putting her hand on his, "Tim will never come back. He was quite right—I see it now—he couldn't marry me. 'One of a queer crowd!' 'Impossible!' You see," she went on quietly, "in a woman's love for a man there's always something of a mother's feeling for him and I want the best for Tim. He must marry some sweet woman with a white soul unspotted by the world—not me, who has been smirched—smirched by hateful experiences. That's the terrible thing, Peter! herd with the black sheep leaves a mark on a woman's soul that nothing can ever wipe away! A man can live through vile things and be just the same afterwards, but a woman never! Nothing can ever be the same again, Peter!"

"No outside thing can touch the soul, little

Marica!" he said tenderly.
"Ah. You really think that?"

"I am sure of it. You are just the same as you ever were. And you could never have stayed on the

Sheep Track, Marica!"

"No," she said eagerly, "that is true. I could never have stayed on the Sheep Track. And even now!" her voice rose suddenly with something of its old iovousness, "even now I'm glad I left it! All the real vital things in my life have happened off the Sheep Track-even meeting Tim! Do you remember," she went on again after a pause, "what you said long ago, that to leave the Sheep Track is often to perish miserably? But it's better to perish than to stagnate! And that's the choice life offers to so many women-stagnation or disaster! I chose to risk disaster, and if I've met it still I'm glad. I'm glad I left the Sheep Track!"

To the man who watched her there was a heartbreaking pathos in her courage-in the indomitable spirit that looked out of her tear-dimmed eyes. He remembered how at their first meeting-at the dinner-party long ago, in Geneva—he had felt her pathos when she had talked of London, fearless in her paper armour of philosophy. "What could the monster do to me?" He could still hear her light laugh as she asked the question. She had started out so full of hope and gaiety on the adventure of life-this girl, who sat here broken and despairing. Yet even now her dreams sustained her and he understood that to the dreamer

life can never be entirely hopeless.

"Listen, Marica," he said earnestly, "you must go away. It is the only thing for you. You must go right away and forget. Travel, see other countries, other people, until the memory of all this is faded."

"I believe you're right."

She rose to her feet and as he helped her to draw her coat over her shoulders, she felt him raise a corner of it and press it to his lips.

"Good-night, Peter," she said, "my best, my only friend!" And she drifted to the door.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE came to Marica Fayne no merciful illness such as usually plunges the heroine of a novel into oblivion after a crisis. With vitality only imperceptibly reduced by sleepless nights and almost untouched meals, life had to be faced—life that stretched before her like a sandy desert, barren of hope or joy. London had become intolerable. At every turn she encountered knife-like thrills of remembrance—this was the path by the Serpentine where she and Balzac had walked with Tim that June morning; these were the streets through which they had glided in his motor, just at that corner he had turned to smile at her! and then St. James's Street where at a window stood a bird-cage full of happy birds, the birds that Tim loved! Oh! to get away, away, where nothing could remind one . . . Papa must be persuaded to leave London!

"Surely we can manage soon to go into the country?" she asked the next evening at dinner. August was nearly here and as yet he had said nothing about

moving.

Mr. Fayne looked up now with a smile.

"Ah, my dear Marica, I have been meaning to discuss that with you. I am thinking of leaving London."

"For good?" she asked in surprise.

"Yes. My work at the Museum is ended and there seems no reason for remaining here any longer."

Heaven be thanked! Here was the way out of it-the chance to go away and forget.

"Ah!" she cried eagerly, "let us go, Papa!"

"Us? Do you really wish to leave London?"
Yes, more than anything in the world."

"My love!" He looked across at her in smiling

bewilderment. "But you have always told me you

loved crowds—people—excitement——! "

"I did once, but now it's different—I don't want them any longer, I want to get right away. Couldn't we go and live abroad again, Papa? I shouldn't mind where it was—St. Jean du Loup—the Gobi desert——"

He shook his head incredulously.

"No, no, my love, you think so for the moment, but in a very short time the place I think of going to would begin to weary you—"

"Ah, you've thought of a place already?"

"Yes!" His eyes took on their most remote expression, as looking through her head at some vision conjured up by his imagination he answered slowly: "There is an island off the coast of Greece—a seagull-haunted island set in the blue and purple Mediterranean, a place of peace and contemplation, where no one ever comes and little waves lap sleepily upon the shore—""

"Papa!" she interrupted him, "I can't imagine anything I should like better! Let us start at once!" But still shaking his head he wandered from the room.

Her mind was quite made up—she would go with him of course. There was nothing to keep her in England, nothing, she told herself drearily, to keep her anywhere. Peter, alone amongst all London's millions, cared what became of her. He came often now to the little house in Blenheim Gardens, wise and kind and often silent, with that understanding silence for which he had a peculiar genius. And then she remembered Nina-Nina who had once cared for her too, she felt sure, in spite of all that had happened. Suddenly she felt she must see Nina once again before she left London. Where was she? Still at Netherbourne with her grandmother? And why did she never write or give a sign of life? Perhaps she knew that Maisie had told Marica everything and was keeping away on purpose.

And on the impulse of the moment Marica decided

to go to Maybury Mansions and find out.

To her surprise a strange maidservant opened the door and looked blankly enquiring as she confronted Marica.

"Is Mrs. Touraine at home?"

"Mrs. Touraine doesn't live here any more," the girl said stolidly.

"Where has she gone to?"

"I'll see if I can find her address."

She moved away, and fumbling amongst the ornaments on the hall mantelpiece, produced a slip of paper with the words: "128 Beak Street, King's

Road, Chelsea," in Nina's writing.

Marica made her way down the stairs again, and calling a taxi-cab drove off to the address in question. The car stopped at last before a row of small grey houses, and in reply to the bell a meek, hopeless little woman of about fifty opened the door, and informing her in weary accents that Mrs. Touraine was at home, she led the way through a narrow hall permeated with an odour of linoleum, boots and boiling cabbage, and throwing open the door of a small sitting-room announced Miss Fayne.

Nina, who was sitting on a horsehair sofa in the window, sprang up and threw her arms around

Marica.

"Marica! You darling! How did you find me out?"

"I got your address at the flat-oh! Nina, why

did you never tell me what had happened?"

As she looked into the lovely Greuze-like face, pale and ethereal as she had never before seen it, all the indignation she felt at Nina's duplicity melted away. Nina who loved pretty things, who had fitted so harmoniously into her cosy niche at Maybury Mansions, now in this dingy room with the horsehair furniture, the bilious wall paper awful china ornaments on the grey marble mantelpiece As Marica sat down on the sofa beside her a sudden mist of tears blinded her. And then she felt the hand whose touch she knew so well, soft, warm and infinitely sympathetic, slipped into hers.

"Nina," she said brokenly, "why did you never

tell me?"

"About what has happened—the case? You've

heard then?"

"Yes-Maisie told me-she was furious with you and she came to see me and said horrible things about you and your friends-about Mrs. Sherwood-all the people who used to be at Maybury Mansions-" Marica gave a little shiver.

"What did she say?" Nina asked quickly.

"I can't remember everything-she used words, expressions I'd never heard before—called you names, said you were all women who took presents from anyone, let men pay your bills—and then she told me you were divorced. Say it isn't true, Nina, say that it was all lies, all hysterical raving!"

There was a moment's silence.

"Maisie was a fiend," Nina said at last, "but what she said about me was true. I was divorced a fortnight ago. The case was undefended."

'A fortnight ago? Then when you came to see

me_after 'Josh's visit-"

"It happened that day," said Nina.
"And you never told me?"
"No, I never told you."

The green eyes were looking frankly into hers without a hint of guilt in their clear depths. And in that moment Marica understood that no base motive had inspired Nina's reticence—there was something behind all this-something Nina could explain.

"Tell me everything now," Marica said, and waited

for Nina to speak.

"It was like this," Nina began, "Teddy, my husband, has been wanting for a long while to be free. He's fallen in love with some dancer at a music-hall, I believe—isn't it odd how dull men like those sort of women? Well, sooner or later he was bound to find out something compromising about me—I don't live like a nun you see. And after a time his suspicions fell on Winky. He discovered Winky was at Maybury Mansions a good deal, that he gave me presents, and finally he heard about our little visit to the Forest Inn."

"The Forest Inn? When we were all three there

together?"

Nina nodded. Marica looked at her in bewilderment. She remembered the incident perfectly. Sir Harry Winkworth had motored Nina and herself to Eastbourne one Sunday early in the spring, and on their way home, late in the evening, the car had broken down and they had been obliged to put up for the night at the Forest Inn, whilst they waited for a "spare part" to be sent from London.

"Of course I remember all about it! You and I had to share a room because the inn was full. And the housemaid was grumpy because we said the bed-

sheets had not been changed."

"The woman had her revenge. She swore that Winky and I were there alone."

"But the innkeeper?"

"He said he didn't remember—he thought there was another lady, but couldn't be sure."

"But it was so simple—you had only to produce

her! I had only to say that I was with you.

"Dear thing, don't you see that was just what we couldn't do? We couldn't produce you, Marica."

"Why on earth not?"

"Darling, it would have done for you! Just at that juncture—when the affair of Lord Windlesham was hanging in the balance, when Captain Harding was already suspicious—to drag you into a divorce-case!"

"But I was perfectly innocent-I had done nothing

wrong, Nina, nor had you or Winky."

"Oh, my dear, there were plenty of little incidents for Teddy to show up about us. And as to you—don't you know that innocent people are just the ones who have most to fear from the law? You've no idea

what our courts of law are like—the mud they can throw on to a spotless reputation. Imagine how they'd have made you appear—a girl who played 'jackal' whilst a married woman amused herself, your photograph in vile papers—cross-examined by a bullying counsel who'd drag to light every trifling indiscretion you'd ever committed. Only people with no character to lose can afford to appear in court—real 'wrong 'uns' usually come out of them without a stain on their characters, whitewashed, triumphant!—I couldn't have let you risk your good name on my account. Marica!"

" Nina!"

Now at last she understood! All this time that she had been distrusting her, almost hating her for her duplicity, Nina had been sacrificing herself to save her reputation, had done a thing so incredibly generous and disinterested that for a moment she could find no words in which to thank her. She knew that all Nina had said was true, that underneath her otherwise light nature was a power of affection that would make her capable of any sacrifice in the cause of friendship. Many men and a very few women are made like thisthey cannot be true in love, but in friendship they are firm and implacable as granite. The man who breaks the heart of the woman who loves him may be a hero amongst his comrades. And so Nina, who could not live without men about her, was yet as the shifting sand when they tried to hold her; whilst to the few women she made her friends she would be a rock of constancy. It was all part of her lawless nature; she could not bear to be bound—there must always be an emergency exit from her love-affairs, some loophole through which she could, if necessary, escape! But for Marica, her friend, she had given up everything that made life worth living!

"Nina!" Marica cried tremulously, throwing her arms round the slim shoulders. "Nina—dearest, how

can I ever make it up to you?"

The green eyes were full of tears as Nina answered:

"Oh, Marica, I'd do anything for you—anything to make things come right. My own life didn't seem to matter half so much-you see, when a woman's made a wretched marriage like mine, she's half done for already, unless she has heaps of money to keep her afloat. I hadn't-and so a little more doing for won't hurt me. But for you it's different-you've got your life before you, and when it came to spoiling your one chance of happiness or making my own circumstances a little worse-why, there was no question about it. All that I really mind is that after all I haven't helped you, that it wasn't in my power to put things right for you. You see," she went on after a moment, "I can never forget that it was through me you left the Sheep-Track, on my account that you guarrelled with Lady Grundisburgh. If she'd still been your friend when you met Lord Windlesham everything might have

"Don't let's talk about it, Nina. That's all over

and done with."

Nina must never know how association with her

circle had been Marica's undoing!

"Tell me," she said abruptly turning the conversation, "what you mean to do. You can't stay here, of course."

"I must—for the present. Maybury Mansions on three guineas a week—which is what Teddy allows me now—was of course impossible. So I moved out at once and took these two rooms till the end of August. They are kept by a retired waiter and his wife—Mr. and Mrs. Bludgeon, so nice of them to be called that, isn't it? Mr. Bludgeon, in the intervals of seeking refreshment at 'The Friend at Hand'—the pub round the corner—is quite attentive, and Mrs. Bludgeon tells me all her troubles until by comparison my own seem really trivial. It's an awful world, Marica!"

"Awful!" The girl gave a little shiver. "But listen, Nina, you must leave this at once and come to us."

Nina shook her head. "Impossible!" And then she got up and began to move restlessly about the room.

"Listen, Marica," she said earnestly, coming at last to a pause on the worn fur hearthrug, and standing with her hands clasped behind her back and a troubled look in the green eyes.

"You mustn't go about with me-with us-any longer. I've felt it vaguely—all along. That first time when Balzac brought me to you and you asked me to come again, I realised that you belonged to a different world—to a set of people with a different code to ours-and I stayed away. Then Balzac tracked me down again and Léontine told me you were ill and lonely—so I came. And then I saw how bored you were amongst these people, and I wanted so much to be friends with you. Oh, Marica, you appealed to me so tremendously—you seemed to me so young, so fresh, so clever, but so unfitted to battle with the world! That was just what Leila said too when she met you-she longed to see more of you-"

"Leila-Mrs. Sherwood?"

"Yes. She's clever too, you know, and she recognised you at once as an affinity. But, of course, you ought never to have been seen at her house-I wanted to tell you but couldn't give away a pal, so I pretended to be jealous of your liking her."

"Tell me." Marica asked incontrollably, "what is

the mystery of Mrs. Sherwood?"

Nina hesitated for a moment, then she said abruptly: "Leila's house in Queen Street belongs to Lord Upchester. His wife has been for years in a drug home and Leila-adores him. So she's outside the social pale. Our civilisation doesn't allow for cases of this kind-in London there's no place for anyone who has wandered off the right sheep-track but to herd with the black sheep-and the London black sheep are the most banal creatures in the world!" She sighed, and then went on: "So, of course, you couldn't know Leila—she saw it herself when Lord Charles Thane told her. And he saw too that you ought not to go about with any of us. That's why he went to Lady Grundisburgh and why I begged you not to quarrel with her. I knew we weren't the right milieu for you. But as I said, our code is different—"

"But there's no harm—no moral harm in what you do, Nina!"

Nina shrugged her shoulders. "That's all a matter of opinion. According to Lady Grundisburgh's code, I suppose I should be considered perfectly abandoned." She hesitated a moment and then added hastily: "What Maisie said about presents was perfectly true, for example. I want to explain about that, Marica, though I don't know how to make you understand. You see, you've always had so much money that you can't possibly imagine what it means to be without it, to have to go without all the things that really make life to one. It isn't the bare necessitiesmutton and soft soap and boot polish that all cost so much and give one no pleasure-that matter, it's the gay trifles that give colour to life. Real poverty's bad enough, but when you have to scrub your own floor and cook your dinner you haven't time or nervous energy to waste on pining for Paris hats or scented soap. Being just hard up is the real horror, especially in London. It's the most awful city in the world if you haven't really tons of money. Anywhere else, like Paris or Vienna, the people of moderate means are provided for-there's lots of cheap fun to be had, and cheap ways of getting pretty things. But London's reserved for millionaires, all the real gaiety goes on behind barricades through which the outside world can't even peep. If you're quite poor you can go in the evening to a pub or a dancing saloon or a picture palace and get your fun that way, but for us—the people in between—there's nothing. It's just a perpetual struggle to make ends meet and not get into debt."

"I know-it must be awful," Marica said gently. "And so you see that was what happened when Ted and I parted. I had just £300 a year! What could I do on that except, as the poor people say, 'keep respectable'? It's dreary work, dear! Your rich relations come and look round at everything to see if you're spending more on luxuries than you're justified in doing, and nod their heads in approval as long as you seem to be respectably impecunious. And you wonder whether their nods and approving smiles are worth it! And then—after a time—a man offers you some trifle—a few flowers, a box of better cigarettes than the rank horrors you've been getting from the little tobacconist round the corner—and nous voilà emballées! Oh, Marica, it's so easy to slip into things, for, of course, after a time it isn't flowers or cigarettes, but theatre tickets, dinners at restaurants, and the lovely things men have always a way of getting for next to nothing. They've a friend in the fur trade, so if you're wanting a new coat this winter or they've picked up a trinket at a sale and let you pay them a trifle for it it's so easy not to enquire what the things are really worth! Then once at a supper party—Maisie was there herself—given by van Boemen, that man from South Africa, vou remember?"

Marica nodded.

"Well, he was simply rolling, and after supper he gave us presents all round-diamonds mounted in different ways—he's something to do with the Rand Mines, you know. Mine happened to be that big heart I wear, and Maisie's was only a hideous little diamond motor car. She's never forgiven me, of course, though I know she pawned it and got that Paris frock with it that Mrs. Davenant Hewetson's supposed to have given her. Then as to the pearls she shouted about to you, they're not mine at all."

"I thought they were given you by your grand-mother at Netherbourne."

[&]quot;I believe I did say so."

"You might have told me the truth—that hurts, Nina!"

"But, dear thing," Nina said, coming swiftly across the room and sitting down beside her, "I didn't say it with intent to deceive—I swear I didn't. You see, I think truth works like this: if by telling the truth you give a false impression, it's more truthful to say something that isn't actually true in itself, but gives the right impression—see?"

"It's a little bit involved, isn't it?"

"Well, I mean that if I'd told you those pearls were Winky's," she went on, letting the big shining balls slip through her fingers as she spoke, "you'd have thought it queer, wouldn't you?"

"I might have wondered why---"

"Just so!" Nina broke in eagerly, "and if your aunts, for example, had asked you how I got them, and you'd told them, they'd have wondered why too, wouldn't they? And I didn't want to put you in a tight place by telling you and asking you not to say. But really the whole thing's quite simple. The pearls belonged to Winky's mother, and they were put away in a bank for years. But one day Winky took them out to look at them and thought they seemed a bit dull, so he showed them to Renson's in Bond Street, and Renson said they only wanted wearing. He said that if they were left shut up any longer they might 'die,' as it's called. So as they're very valuable, Winky brought them round and asked me to wear them for him-and I do-that's all. But, of course, if I'd told that story to people no one would have believed me, so I thought the grandmother explanation less misleading. Oh, Marica, I swear to you that's the truth, and the whole of it."

The green eyes were looking clear and unflinchingly at Marica now. "I swear to you on my solemn oath," Nina said earnestly, "that I've run straight, darling!"

And Marica knew that she spoke the truth, that here again Nina's fierce love of freedom had been her salvation. It might be impossible to her to refuse a

tempting present just as it would be impossible to a child to refrain from putting out its hand to grasp a toy dangled before its eyes, but when it came to allowing anyone to have a hold over her, Nina's frantic independence would assert itself and she would retain her self-respect.

She put her hand gently on her friend's.
"Yes, dear Nina," she said with a little sigh—half of relief at Nina's assurance, half of regret at the sad necessity that had been her undoing, "I do believe vo11."

CHAPTER XV.

PETER listened in silence whilst Marica told him Nina's story and still, when she had ended, he sat with his head resting on his hand, looking straight before him without speaking.

"Peter," she urged, "tell me that you're glad that—that it's all right about Nina—that you think

she was splendid."

"Of course," he answered, "she was quite splendid! And yet—" there was something almost savagely protective in his eyes as he looked into the small face before him. If only he could have saved her from this experience! Even supposing Nina were all that Marica believed, what of her environment, the tawdry world of artifice and subterfuge in which she could exist quite happily, but where Marica was so pathetically incongruous?

"You—and those people," he broke out incontrollably, "it's unthinkable! You who hate everything

that is ugly-"

"Ah," she interrupted him gently, "perhaps it's just because one hates ugliness one may have to face it—to learn to understand—tout comprendre pour tout

pardonner?"

After Peter had gone she sat for a long while in the twilight thinking. She remembered how long ago Lord Charles had said: "To leave the Sheep Track is to complicate life enormously." For on the Sheep Track everyone lives according to codes that no one stops to question, whilst off it one begins to realise that every code, moral or social, is merely the outcome of the climate, period, or people from which it is evolved. What is right in one country, in one century, in one civilisation, is wrong in another—what moral code can fit them all? Not a moral code, but

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a moral sense, she told herself with sudden conviction—a desire to raise the relations of men and women on to the highest plane. Any morality that did not aim at this, she felt passionately, was not morality at all, but merely a system of expediency no more aspiring than the game-laws!

And what was the morality of the Sheep Track she had left? The morality of girls married amidst the applause of their friends to men they merely regarded as the inevitable accompaniment of substantial incomes, the morality of the world that flocked to Mrs. Malines' parties, the world that never hits a woman with a strong man at her back—what moral sense underlay all this system of pretended virtue, this policy of condemnation and connivance?

Ah, it was not on the Sheep Track that the solution to the gigantic problem we call life was to be found!

Had not Seneca arrived at the same conclusion nearly 1900 years ago? She took the little worn volume from her bookshelf and read again the words that seemed to have been written by this wise and human friend for her especial guidance:—

". . . . if we either follow the cry, or the track of people that are out of the way, we must expect to be misled, and to continue our days in wandering and error. Wherefore it highly concerns us to take along with us a skilful guide: for it is not in this as in other voyages, where the highway brings us to our destination; or if a man should happen to be out, where the inhabitants might set him right again: but on the contrary the beaten road is here the most dangerous, and the people, instead of helping us, misguide us. Let us not, therefore, follow like sheep, but rather govern ourselves by reason than by other men's fashions Human affairs are not disposed so happily that the best things please the most men. It is an argument that the cause is bad when the common sort applaud. The common sort find it easier to believe than to judge, and content themselves with what is usual, never examining whether it be good or no. common sort is intended the man of title as well as the clouted shoe; for I do not distinguish them by the eye, but I have a better and truer light: let the soul find out the good of the soul!"

Yes, that was the only guide—the soul that manifests itself in the subtle aura which surrounds each human being, proclaiming in defiance of the label affixed to them by the world, what manner of man or woman they may be. Why was it, Marica had often wondered, that some so-called "good people" made one feel that life was mean and narrow, whilst others with no reputation for virtue, filled one with a sense of all its glorious possibilities? And Nina in her irresponsible way had this priceless gift-the power of making one feel that it was good to be alive, that the world was wide and wonderful, with beauty and pathos and humour on every side if one but had the eves to see it.

Peter, whom Marica persuaded to go with her one day to Beak Street, soon fell under the spell of Nina's personality, and between these two who loved Marica

an odd, incongruous friendship sprang up.

And now with the need of helping Nina, something of her old joy in living returned to Marica, for Nina provided the human interest without which life is intolerable to a woman-Nina wanted her, she was no

longer superfluous.

In vain she begged her friend to accept the half of her own dress allowance, but this Nina steadily refused. and Marica was driven to slipping sovereigns into the weary hand of Mrs. Bludgeon with a request to provide Mrs. Touraine with luxuries of which two guineas a week for board and lodging did not admit.

"Oh, Nina, if only you would come to us!" she

begged repeatedly.

But Nina only shook her head. "It's better as it is!" And then one day she added abruptly: "By

the way, Winky has, of course, asked me to marry him."

- "And you won't?"
- "Oh no—I couldn't care for him in that way. And at least like this I'm free."
- "Nina," Marica said with a sudden inspiration, if Papa and I go abroad will you come with us?"
- "Abroad? Ah, that would be different—no one would know us. Yes, if I could afford that it would be splendid."

Marica made up her mind to put the scheme before her father immediately. She was sure he would agree, for he had always liked Nina—she was pretty and gentle and never jarred on his taste with the aggressive clothes and rasping voice that some "smart" women affect. Yes, she would ask Papa about it next morning at breakfast.

But when she came downstairs soon after nine o'clock, Denman approached her mysteriously, and

made the brief announcement:

"Mr. Fayne has started, mum."
Started? For the Museum?"

"No, mum, for abroad. Went off quite sudden—without a word of warning."

Marica sank down upon the bottom stair and looked

at the old man helplessly.

"But tell me," she said at last, "how did it

happen?"

"Well, mum," Denman said in a bewildered voice, "I was standing here as it might be when Mr. Fayne came down the stairs and told me to whistle up a cab immediate. I thought nothing of it and a taxi came at once, and then Mr. Fayne told me to put in his bag and portmanteau. I come all over queer at that, mum, and asked him if he was going away. 'Yes, Denman,' he says, 'I'm going on a journey,' and never a word more did he say. I was so took aback that I never thought to come and tell you, mum, until it was too late. He must have been gone ten minutes now,"

Denman added, taking out his bulging silver watch

and consulting it.

"Ten minutes? Then I must follow him!" Marica cried, springing up. "Call me a taxi at once, Denman."

"Very good, mum." The old man turned towards the door, but a letter lying on the hall table caught

his eye.

"I was nearly forgetting," he said, taking it up and carefully placing it on a salver to hand to Marica, "Mr. Fayne left this note for you, mum."

Marica grasped it eagerly, and tore it open.

"Dearest child," it said, "I am leaving this morning for the island off the coast of Greece of which I spoke to you and I trust you will not be grieved at the step I have taken. It is only on your account, my dear Marica, that I came to this decision—for I need hardly tell you how deeply it pains me to leave you thus, without even a farewell! But I know too well your generous nature and that, were I to give you the opportunity, you would insist on going with me. That, dear child, is a sacrifice I could not ask of you! I know you better perhaps than you know yourself, and though at present you might believe you could be happy in the solitude I seek, the time would come when you would weary of it and crave for the gay life which is your natural environment. And so I go forth alone—yet my last thoughts are for you! The aunts will of course invite you to make your home with them and I can rest assured you will be happily provided for. Farewell, my love!

Your affectionate father,

Edward Fayne."

"P.S.—My bankers—Milne, Glegg & Co.—will provide you with as much money as you require—a mere trifle will suffice for my needs."

The small folded paper fell from Marica's hands.

What was she to do? Did he really mean she was not to follow him? Well, whether he meant it or not, she would do it. She could not let him vanish out of her life like this. Bitterly she told herself that she had never loved him enough-never shown him enough how much he was to her. For now that he was gone-gone perhaps irrevocably-she realised as she had never done before the place he occupied in her heart. He was so splendid, so high-souled, so far above the pettiness of ordinary men and women. she told herself again. Ah, why had she not tried to live up to him, to become the kind of daughter he must have wished to possess? She saw it all now-it was her own fault that she had failed to satisfy him. She might have made herself necessary to him, have entered into the things he loved, have studied Persian or taken to lecturing on Greek vases like the attenuated lady in the sage green djibbah to whom he had once introduced her at the British Museum! And now it was perhaps too late!

She flew upstairs two steps at a time, and putting on her hat, dashed off in the fleetest of taxis to Charing Cross station to which Denman had told her Mr. Fayne had driven. Opening the door before the car had come to a standstill she flung the fare into the driver's hands and made her way feverishly through the crowd to the platform. But only the empty

metalled line confronted her.

"The Continental train?" she gasped, arresting the attention of a passing official.

"Been gone two minutes, Miss!" he answered

cheerfully, and went his way.

She stepped back, sick with disappointment. What was to be done?

Hardly knowing where she was going, she walked out of the station—the station at which she had arrived nearly five years ago full of hope and confidence. For the first time the thought of her own forlornness occurred to her. What was to become of her? Her last mooring had failed her. She was adrift!

Papa's suggestion that she should make her home with the aunts filled her with despair, but at present she could see no other way out of the difficulty, and hailing a cab, she drove off to Queen's Gate.

The three ladies were assembled in the big blue drawing-room and received Marica's news in bewildered silence. Harriet was the first to break it.

"Of course you cannot live alone, my dear," and turning to Charlotte she added in a tone of finality: "Marica must come to us!"

Lady Plumpton resumed her crochet and made no reply for a moment. Then she remarked briefly: "You forget that we have no spare room, Harriet!" No spare room? My dear Charlotte——"

But Lady Plumpton, disregarding the exclamation, continued to speak in the smooth tones she was wont

to employ in moments of acute irritation.

"You see, my dear Marica, our only spare room is at present occupied by Dawkins. The poor soul is no longer able to manage the stairs up to the bedroom she used to occupy on the third floor, so we have been obliged to move her down to the room which we formerly kept for visitors——"

"Really, Charlotte!" Harriet began incontrollably, but the voice of Louisa struck in like a cold steel knife,

cutting the thread of her sister's remonstrance.

"My dear Harriet," she remarked, "the question of accommodation is not the only difficulty. A far more insuperable obstacle lies in Marica's scheme of life."

"In my scheme of life?" Marica murmured in a bewildered tone.

But Louisa continued imperturbably to Harriet. "Marica, as she has often admitted, lives to be amused. We," she turned and looked her niece sternly in the eye, "have other aims!"

"So I supposed!" Marica answered gently.

She could not feel angry with this hard-eyed, relentless woman. Louisa, she knew, was not at heart unkind, she was only totally without imagination. Where she could understand she could sympathise, and overworked curates, weary district visitors, or erring factory girls found in her a friend and helper—she was almost worshipped in parochial circles. But that anyone should want to amuse themselves was to Louisa incomprehensible; that they should amuse themselves in an unconventional way—unpardonable.

Marica rose hastily to her feet.

"I quite see, Aunt Louisa, it would never do for me to come and live with you. And now I must be going. I have to go and see a friend——" Hastily brushing Aunt Charlotte's cushioned countenance with her small pale cheek, she hurried from the room.

Harriet followed her impulsively on to the landing:

"Dear Marica, I'm so extremely sorry—"

"But, of course, I understand!" Marica answered giving her a quick hug, "and really it's better like this—Nature never meant four women to live together! I shall be all right—don't worry about me!" and with a wave of the hand she vanished down the staircase.

She must go and see Nina! This was the only thought in her mind, and she made her way over the baking pavement in the direction of Chelsea. Nina was still her friend and at a crisis it was to friends, not to relations, one could look for help. Blood, she reflected, might be thicker than water, but it was a good deal more likely to run dry.

In answer to her ring, Mrs. Bludgeon opened the door. Marica, looking at the little woman—one of the many brave battered little wrecks of humanity that make up the nation's life—noticed that the small hopeless face was puckered into fresh furrows of anxiety.

"The poor lady don't seem at all well this morning, Miss," she said in a mysterious whisper as she

admitted the girl into the dingy hall.

"Ah! Is anything the matter with Mrs. Touraine?" Marica asked anxiously, leaning back against the imitation marble wall-paper. "Is she really ill? I have thought once or twice lately she was looking pale, but hoped it was only the heat——"

Mrs. Bludgeon shook her head dolefully. " It's just the way my poor sister went off, Miss. Consumption it was with 'er. And this poor lady 'as just the same look-and coughing too, just like poor

"Oh, but Mrs. Touraine is quite strong really-

"So was Susie," Mrs. Bludgeon interposed eagerly, with the determined pessimism of her class. never saw a stronger girl than Susie was before she

was took like that-

"I'll go in and see Mrs. Touraine," Marica said abruptly moving towards the door of Nina's tiny sitting-room. But on opening it a voice from behind the heavy rep curtain that divided it from the bedroom at the back, called faintly to her:
"Marica, is that you? Come in here, darling!"

Nina was sitting up in bed, pale and dishevelled.

"I'm feeling simply rotten this morning. It's the heat I suppose. And the dust off the pavements has started me coughing."

Horrible visions of "La Dame aux Caméllias" flashed across Marica's mind as she sat down on the edge of the bed and looked at Nina's shattered beauty.

"Darling," she cried impulsively, "you must come out of this! You can't go on living in this way. We'll go abroad somewhere together—listen, Nina," and she recounted the story of her father's sudden disappearance. "I can hardly believe he's really gone," she ended sadly, "it's almost as difficult to realise as it used to be difficult to realise that he was there. He's always seemed so unreal-I've sometimes wondered whether I've imagined him."

"He'll probably come back as suddenly as he

went!" Nina suggested hopefully.

Marica shook her head.

"Oh, no, I don't think he'll ever come back!" she said, blinking back the tears that rose incontrollably to her eyes. "Nature meant him for a recluse. His marriage was merely an accident—the result of one of the whimsical moments that come at times to intellectuals-it didn't affect the main scheme of his life in the least. As to me—" she spread out her hands in a helpless gesture, "he's never known what to do with me at all. I've been de trop from birth." "Don't say that!" cried Nina—" You're every-

thing to me. Marica!"

"I'll believe that if you'll do as I ask you and come away with me. But, first of all, you must see a doctor," she added with the ingenuous belief in medical aid of the person who has never had anything to do with illness.

Nina smiled. "What can a doctor do?"

"He can tell us at any rate what's the matter with

"I envy you your simple faith, dear. But if it

makes you any happier-""

"Of course it will-I'll ask Aunt Charlotte who to go to—she loves giving advice. And meanwhile you must feed up. Do the Bludgeons do you well?"

She had wondered sometimes how far her contributions to the Bludgeon exchequer had found their way to Nina's table instead of into the till of "The Friend at Hand," where Mr. Bludgeon passed his leisure hours.

"Oh, quite surprisingly well!" Nina answered reassuringly. "They actually gave me turtle soup last night for dinner-I can't think how they manage it. Everybody has been so kind you know," she went on gaily." "Winky and Pat and Leila Sherwood and several other women-bringing me flowers and cigarettes, and taking me for motor runs. Heaven for one's pals, Marica! That's the best of being a woman of no importance—such friends as one has do stick to one whatever happens. There's really nothing like being poor for retaining one's faith in human nature-one only sees the best side of it, the side that loves to give, not the hateful side that writhes under a sense of obligation."

"Yes, how true that is!" said Marica. thought of the protégés towards whom Aunt Louisa played the part of benefactress—did any of them love her like Nina's friends who mustered round her at this crisis?

Looking round the tiny room she wondered again why warm-heartedness and laxity of morals should so often go together! On every side were evidences of kindly thoughts—books and magazines, boxes of marrons glacés, and the best cigarettes lay on the table, but more than all these was the fact that these people came to see her because they loved her for herself, with no arrière-pensées such as actuated people in more select circles of society.

"Well, good-bye, Nina," she said, getting up at last to go. "I must go and see Aunt Charlotte at once about a doctor and after that we can make our

plans."

Lady Plumpton was of course delighted to be asked for advice and at once recommended Dr. Heatley Hawkins of 400 Harley Street, as the best possible authority to consult. The great man made an appointment for a few days later, and after the inevitable wait of half an hour which the successful doctor is always careful to inflict upon his patients, Nina Touraine and Marica were shown into his consulting-room.

One of the favourite pastimes of the Harley Street specialist is the making of startling announcements to his unsuspecting patients. His life is no doubt monotonous, and it forms a pleasant break in the weary business of examining protruded tongues and pillowing one's ear on backs and chests, to fire off an occasional bomb that rouses the hitherto boring

patient to fury or despair.

Dr. Heatley Hawkins was particularly fond of this form of diversion. He loved nothing so much as to tell a happy man of apparently robust physique that he had only three months to live, or when a woman believed herself, sometimes rightly, to be at death's door, to order her angrily to go and scrub floors and have done with hysteria.

Since Nina Touraine walked into Dr. Heatley Hawkins' consulting-room in the best of spirits, assuring him that she was really perfectly well and had only come to see him in order to please her friend, Miss Fayne, who thought she looked seedy, it was therefore only to be expected that the great man should conclude his examination of Nina's chest, heart, liver, throat, etc., with the startling verdict: "You have a large cavity in each lung, and unless you go into a sanatorium immediately you will be dead in a year."

And now it was Dr. Heatley Hawkins' turn to be startled, for the pretty little doll-like creature he had expected to see give vent to exclamations of horror and amazement, broke into a silvery peal of laughter and wound her chiffon scarf around her with as careful an eye for effect as if her death warrant had not just

been shouted at her.

"My dear Dr. Hawkins, I am sorry you take such a very alarming view of my case, but as to going into

a sanatorium—never, never, never-er!"

Her voice trilled up gaily to the disappearing point. She turned to Marica. "Imagine me, dear, in a sanatorium! I should be bored to screams in a week! No, no. If I have a year to live, let it be a year of crowded life. We must eat and drink and be merry, Marica! And now, good-bye, Dr. Hawkins! It's no good my coming again to see you as there is nothing to be done, is there?"

And without waiting for his answer she slipped her fee into his palm and with a handshake smiled herself

out of the room.

On their way home in the taxi she still talked

gaily on.

"We must have a good time, Marica! You see, I have a thousand pounds of my own that an uncle once left me; it only brings in a wretched £40 a year, but now of course I can blow the capital, and you've got enough—?"

"About £5,000 a year Milne and Glegg said yesterday," Marica answered vaguely, "but oh! Nina,

what's the good of money? If Dr. Hawkins was

right---''

"My dear, for Heaven's sake don't worry. Doctors are generally wrong. This old boy struck me as drawing the long bow—wanted to get me into some horrid 'home' he had got shares in, and thought he'd scare me! But even if he's right," she went on with a shrug of the shoulders, "what matter? We must all die one day and I should loathe to be old! Think of the horror of that—to take to pieces at night, to see one's face collapse like a concertina when one took one's front teeth out! a bald head on the pillow! a double chin! Oh, I couldn't bear it!" She put her hand gently on Marica's. "Please don't worry about me, dear thing! I'd really so much rather be dead than poor and old—and if I lived I should be both."

"Nina, dear little Nina, what should I do without you?" Marica said brokenly.

"Why, marry Peter, of course!"

Marica shook her head.

"But why not?" Nina persisted with sudden eagerness, "he's a perfect dear, the most understanding sympathetic person in the world—"

"I know, I know, but I couldn't---"

"Because of Tim?"

Marica nodded. "It's like this, Nina. I believe if I had never met Tim I could have loved Peter. But now, somehow, I feel as if I were under a spell which nothing will break—the thought of Tim is always with me, all day, every day—I can't get away from it——"

"You must get away from it, you must!" Nina cried vehemently. "Tim isn't worth it! Believe me—for I know men far better than you do, dear, and I know that Peter Trent is worth six of Lord Windlesham. No man who has always had everything he wanted is worth a woman spoiling her life for! You must break the spell, Marica!"

"But how?"

"By getting right away. Why shouldn't you and I go on the long trail together?"

Her eyes shone with a sudden excitement and

Marica's too caught their gleam.

"Yes, yes, to the East!"

All at once, that moment long ago on the quay at Marseilles came back to her—that moment of wild longing to sail away to the world beyond the sunrising, once the cradle of the human race and where

still its heart beats on unchanged by time.

She looked out at the hot London street that stretched before them. London, with its ceaseless streams of tired people, its crowds of hungry women surging before the shop-fronts in search of mythical bargains; London, with its turmoil and unrest, its weary jarring noises, its reek of baking asphalt and stinging fumes of petrol, seemed to her at that moment unendurable. She felt she could understand why, when love failed him, a man's instinct was to rush to Africa in pursuit of big game—it was not the lust of slaughter that drove him, but the craving to be back with Nature, amidst her great silences and limitless horizons.

"Civilisation is all wrong!" she cried incontrollably, "it has taken us so far away from all the simple things that matter. We've got to get back to them for a time, back to a natural way of living—to eat and sleep and live in the sun and forget complexities. It'll do far more for you, Nina, than a sanatorium where people take their temperatures and count their bacilli. And it's what I need too!" And as she leant back in the taxi with closed eyes she felt the great peace of the Far East already around her.

CHAPTER XVI.

TEA was laid in the big oak-panelled hall at Merewater one afternoon in the following October, and Lady Windlesham, as she sat alone behind the hissing tea-urn, waiting for the sound of the expected motor, laid down the morning paper with a sigh. It was the first moment during her busy day she had found leisure to look at it and now, taking it up idly to while away the time of waiting for Tim's arrival from the station, she had come upon a more than usually virulent "Limehouse" directed against the class vaguely stigmatised by its author as the "dukes."

Lady Windlesham's charming face, framed in its fine white hair, expressed a gentle bewilderment. Why were these people so violent about the men who—like her own son Tim, for example—had only

committed the crime of inheriting estates?

Looking back over the forty years of her life at Merewater, she recalled with a pleasant glow of contentment the Arcadian conditions that had always existed here. Her husband had been one of the breezy outdoor men usually to be found in the ranks of society at which the democrats of the day are fond of levelling their bitterest sarcasm. Yet Lord Windlesham with his handsome, ruddy face and cheery blue eye had understood the dwellers on his estate, as the glue merchant who had bought up the neighbouring property was totally unable to do. Sir Alfred Budgely, M.P., expected them to "see reason," as he expressed it; Lord Windlesham, himself unhampered by logic, lent a sympathetic ear to their grievances—reasonable or otherwise—and if he did not always redress them his attitude of camaraderie dispelled any feeling of discontent. Indeed to these antiquated intelligences to be Lord Windlesham's tenants seemed a great piece of good luck, and they

felt nothing but a haughty contempt for Sir Alfred Budgely, who strove in vain to instil democracy into constitutionally feudal minds. Lady Windlesham herself was always on the best of terms with the tenants' wives, and this afternoon she had returned from sitting in their cottages talking to them of their ailments in primitive language uncomplicated by the "itises" with which the middle-class brain is prone to grapple.

Everyone had enquired after "his lordship"! Dear Tim, thought his mother fondly, no wonder they all adored him! His coming of age seven years ago was one of her happiest memories; she could see him still, standing on the broad stone terrace, the sunlight shining on his fair hair, amidst a crowd of cheering tenantry. It was indeed no wonder that Lady Windlesham's reflections brought a glow of

pride to her beautiful features.

And certainly the most envenomed instigator of class hatred could not fail to realise the charm of young Lord Windlesham. As a product of what may be described as "The Simple Life System" on which he had been brought up, he was probably as perfect a specimen as one could find throughout a house to house visitation of the "stately homes of England." He was always happy, for he had always found the world a pleasant place to live in; he was perfectly unself-conscious because he had never had to bother what anybody thought about him; he felt kindly towards everyone for everyone felt kindly towards him. That any factor had been missing in the manner of his upbringing never occurred for a moment to a single member of his adoring entourage.

Born a strong and healthy baby with a well-developed cranium and an intelligence distinctly above the average, he had gone through the succeeding stages of infantile accomplishments with a precocity that would have delighted middle-class parents and was received with mild complacency by his own. The fact that he learnt his letters with astonishing

rapidity pleased them, however, less than his seat upon the small Shetland pony bought for him at the age of three. He was always a favourite amongst his companions—the children of his parents' acquaintances, little boys and girls in precisely his own circumstances.

In due course he was sent to the same comfortable preparatory school as some of these same small boys, where, in consequence, he never felt himself a stranger or suffered the untold miseries of home-sickness. Later on he was moved to Eton where again he found himself surrounded with a ready-made phalanx of acquaintances; thence again with the phalanx he entered Sandhurst, and finally when he joined his regiment half his brother officers were already known to him.

Thus from the beginning of his school life till the day he succeeded to the family honours on the death of his father, he had never for a moment known the sensation of being a "new boy" strange and shy amongst a crowd of unknown faces, never experienced the constraint of the newly-joined subaltern, who dreads at every turn to make a wrong impression, or to violate unintentionally the unwritten code of his comrades. As he arrived at each new scene, familiar faces invited him, friendly hands gripped his, familiar codes prevailed. The most formative process in the world—that of arriving on the scene an unknown quantity, had never come within his experience. Instead of being obliged to make his own mark, his own standing amongst his companions, he arrived labelled by his title and his circle of acquaintances. He had no need of discrimination in the choice of his companions, no opportunities for developing one of the most important points in a man's training—that of reading character. His education, needless to say, entailed no strain on his brain-power-he learnt his mathematics by heart and "mugged up" his classics with a crib.

And in this way Tim Windlesham, like many

others of his kind, was able to reach the age of twenty-eight without ever in his life having had to make a serious mental effort. The brain-power given him at birth had been trained in one direction only—that of using the present moment and the things within his own experience—those outside it had no existence for him. The democrats, who speak of his class as "brainless," might as well describe the old Mikados of Japan as "legless" because, having never been allowed to put their feet to the ground, they were unable to run. Tim was far from brainless—his brain-power was merely limited to the exercises in which it had been trained.

It was literally therefore the first time in his life that Lord Windlesham had been confronted with a problem, of an intangible kind, when he found himself in love with a woman whom his family and friends

regarded as "impossible."

He had returned home in answer to the telegram sent him by Claire's directions, to find his mother evidently very unwell. The news contained in Claire's letter had indeed seriously disturbed Lady Windlesham's normal serenity, and she had no need of artifice to appear unnerved. For the first few days she had seemed to want Tim always near her and of course he had stayed, resisting the wild longing that from time to time overcame him to rush back to London and find out for himself why his letter to Marica had remained unanswered. "Only send me a line," he had written feverishly that day at the Club, "just to say if you really care for me and I'll come to you. But if you don't love me don't answer this—I couldn't bear it." And she had not answered! Was it that she did not care? And yet—and yet—but at this point in his reflections his well-balanced brain would readjust itself and recall him to the claims of the present moment. There was nothing to be gained by fruitless speculation!

His mother watching him at these abstracted moments—which grew daily less frequent—guessed

something of what was passing in his mind. She was of course far too tactful to question him, but without mentioning any names, and so vaguely that he could hardly discover whether she had been told of the episode, she made him feel its incongruity with the main scheme of his life. In her gentle, musical voice she talked to him from time to time of his position, of the duty he owed to his family, and then with the utmost delicacy worked round to the question of the future Lady Windlesham. One day-before long—she hoped to hear he had made a suitable choice—a choice worthy of him. One heard so much nowadays of foolish marriages-of young men carried away by the impulse of the moment, or a mistaken sense of chivalry, into taking a step they spent the rest of their lives regretting. Of course dear Tim would never think of doing anything unworthy of his traditions-of making an actual mésalliance, but a marriage might not be actually a mésalliance and yet exceedingly unwise. It was so important to marry a girl in one's own world, who shared one's tastes and ideas, accustomed to associate only with really nice people . . . did not dear Tim agree with her?

Yes, Tim quite agreed, all that was important, and then with an unwonted expansiveness he had added: "But don't you think, darling, there is even more than that to be considered? Don't you think that a woman—a really splendid sort of woman might be an inspiration to one?-make one feel one was a bit of a rotter just to take all the good things that came one's way without trying to be some real

use in the world?"

"But, dearest Tim," his mother said gently, "you have always done your duty—in the county, in the

regiment—everywhere—"
"I've sometimes felt lately," Tim said slowly, "that there may be something more than duty-than only doing the things that come one's way. I mean that one might go out of one's way to do things. I know," he added hurriedly, "that I'm no good at expressing myself, but some people make one want to be something, make more of one's life, make one feel its possibilities—you see what I mean, darling?"

Lady Windlesham sighed. She saw quite well what he meant. It was so like dear Tim to put anyone he loved—even the Covent Garden lady—on a pedestal and use her as an inspiration! She noted with concern the glow of enthusiasm that had lit up Tim's charming face as he was speaking, and with a mother's quick instinct she realised that here was a new force at work, which was not to be overcome by argument. So she gently changed the subject and from that day onwards it was never again referred to by either of them. Henceforth, half-unconsciously, she adopted a far wiser course. She knew well Tim's most vulnerable point—his love of the known and familiar. And so she set herself to wrap him round in an atmosphere of old associations.

As the soft, languorous summer days went by the present closed around him more and more. Walking with his mother slowly about the stately old garden with its wide, smooth lawns and towering yew hedges, playing cricket with Jimmy, motoring with Claire, riding round the estate and chatting with his tenants, discussing questions connected with the hounds—the strange un-English girl he had met amongst such different surroundings seemed part of another existence. Just as the explorer returned from Arctic snowfields finds his most breathless adventures dwindle into insignificance when replaced by the homely environment of his own fireside, so the memory of that brief fortnight of intoxication slowly faded into unreality now that the present moment resumed its sway over his consciousness.

Lady Windlesham watched him with a growing relief at her heart. The moments of abstraction that had come to him at first were growing less frequent, plans for house-parties roused him to something of his old animation. Claire Wavertree, who was at Merewater with Jimmy on a long visit, invited down parties

of friends which usually included the Tinker and sometimes the widow of one of Tim's oldest friends—Mrs. Tommy Darset.

It was to this old and tried *intime* that Lady Windlesham one evening confided her anxieties for Tim's

future,

"Tim is so fond of you, dear Edith," she remarked, "that I feel I can talk about him quite freely. Just lately we have been dreadfully afraid he was becoming involved in some fresh 'entanglement.' I hope and trust however that is all over and if only he would make up his mind now to marry some nice and suitable

girl, all would be well!"

The present was, she felt, the psychological moment for Tim to make up his mind on this all-important subject. She knew that a man is never so susceptible to a woman's charm as when his normal immunity to sentiment has been broken down by a recent love affair; just as a patient recovering from influenza is liable to contract any infection with which he may be brought in contact. Now was Lady Windlesham's chance for providing a counter-attraction!

"I shall never feel quite happy until dear Tim is safely married!" she said plaintively. If only we could find the right girl for him!" And then putting her hand appealingly on Mrs. Darset's she added: "You must know so many girls, Edith—you are now so much more in the world than I am.

Couldn't you think of anyone suitable?"

"Oh, there are always plenty of girls!" Mrs. Darset answered with her tired smile. "The trouble

is to get Tim to notice them!"

"Yes, that's just it," Lady Windlesham agreed. She remembered her many fruitless attempts in the past to make a suitable match for Tim—the innumerable "nice girls" she had had down "on approval" only to see them treated by Tim with brotherly camaraderie and golden moments in the rose garden wasted in talking about "avatavats" or cocker spaniel puppies.

"Dear Lady Windlesham, I will certainly do what I can," Mrs. Darset said kindly. "If Tim will join one of my shooting parties in October, I will make a point of asking the nicest girls I know to meet him!"

When a few weeks later Captain Harding's engagement to Cynthia Brinton—whom Lady Windlesham had known from infancy—was announced, Tim's mother felt all the more anxious that his future should be arranged as satisfactorily as that of the guardian

angel.

For the Harding-Brinton engagement met with unqualified approval from everyone; outside her own circle Cynthia's reputation might be lurid, but in it, as one of the accepted facts of life, she was safe from criticism. Everyone who had been long enough on the county sheep-track enjoyed the same immunity-dear old Bill Beadon, who always "did one over a horse" if one was foolish enough to give him the chance, but was still "one of the best" all the same; or Lady Sally Marling, whose language in the hunting-field was an education even to the grooms, but was still "quite a dear when you really knew her"—it didn't matter what anybody might be, provided they had always been there. For the strength of every sheep-track lies in its unfailing esprit de corps; once the feet of a sheep are firmly set on that well-worn path it may gambade as it chooses with never a bleat of disapproval from the herd. And so, though every member of the county sheep-track had heard of Cynthia's escapades, it never occurred to anyone to modify their congratulations to "dear old Tinker" on this account.

If only Tim woull be as sensible and make up his mind to marry one of the many suitable girls Mrs. Darset had invited him to meet! For the middle of October was now here and Tim had accepted the invitation of his old friend's widow and had been spending the last week at her house in Yorkshire from which he was to return this evening.

And now as Lady Windlesham sat peacefully in the twilight waiting for the sound of the motor that would announce his arrival her mind conjured up again, as it had done a hundred times during the last seven years, the golden future that she dreamt of for this beloved boy of hers. She saw in imagination the lovely girl, young, brilliant, well-bred, charming, who would take her place at Merewater, who would sit at the head of the long dinner-table entertaining Tim's friends, whose light foot would sound over the shining oak of the long galleries—no unworthy successor to the dignified ancestresses who looked down on her from the walls. And after a time there would be the sound of children's voices, little footsteps overhead, the familiar sounds of revelry echoing once again from Tim's own nurseries! Ah! if only Tim chose wisely—proved himself worthy of his tradi-

And at that moment the deep-voiced boom of his motor horn sounded on the drive. Immediately a stir of expectation arose, men-servants hurried forward to throw open the great folding doors, a rush of cold air blew into the hall, and then Tim, wrapped in his thick motor coat, his face glowing with the chill of the autumn evening, came forward holding out his hands towards his mother.

"My dear boy!"

"Mother-darling-isn't it splendid to be home again?"

The old words that they had said to each other every time he had returned home from his first holidays, yet always new with the present sense of perfect joy!

After he had finished his tea and they were left alone together by the blazing log-fire, Tim came and sat down beside his mother on the sofa and took her hand in his.

"Mother," he said, "I've something to tell that I hope will make you happy. You know how often last summer you talked to me about marrying—about choosing a woman in one's own world, someone who

saw things from the same point of view. You were so right, darling—as always. And—after a while—I saw it too. Edith Darset seemed to make it plainer—you know she and I have always been pals, in dear old Tommy's time it was just the same. She's a real good sort, don't you think so, Mother?" he added anxiously.

"Yes, dear, of course I have always been devoted

to Edith."

"Then, Mother, I think you'll be pleased at what I have to tell you. This morning I asked Edith Darset to marry me—and she consented."

"Oh, my dear, dear boy!"

The cry which held a sharp note that might have been dismay or merely surprise, broke from her incontrollably. And then there followed an instant of silence whilst her mind with quick loyalty adjusted itself to the entirely unexpected turn events had taken. In that instant her former dreams of Tim's future were hastily dispelled—the vision of the lovely wife that was to be his, the voices of his children—and in their place she saw the woman Tim had chosen, the woman of his own world, who had always associated with the right people, who always did the right thing and went to the right houses. And she told herself firmly that Tim had chosen wisely.

"Mother," he said gently, breaking the silence at

last, "tell me that you're glad!"

"Oh, my darling," she answered, smiling through the tears that had risen to her eyes, "if you are happy of course I am glad!"

CHAPTER XVII.

One mellow autumn morning two years later, the usual contingent of victims to the British climate were to be seen cautiously sunning themselves up and down the "Invalids' Walk" at Netherbourne. Beneath a spreading pine tree, carefully sheltered from the breeze, a large and luxurious bath-chair was drawn up, and its occupant, a woman of about forty, swathed in Russian sables, sat listening with a tired smile to the young man seated on a camp-stool at her side, reading aloud to her from a purple covered book. It was a pretty story that he read, full of the luscious sentimentality that appeals so strongly to people who pass their lives in an atmosphere of condensed prose.

"Quite charming, Tim, isn't it?" she remarked as the young man reached the end of the chapter. Tim looked up with a smile; he was thankful to have found something to allay the querulousness that since his wife's lapse into invalidism had seemed to grow on her. His voice was very patient, very tender,

as he answered:

"I'm so glad it interests you, dear."

"Don't you like it too?"

He hesitated a moment. "I can't help feeling," he said at last, sincerity getting the better of his desire to please her, "that a fellow who wore a pink shirt and mauve socks wanted kicking—badly! Still, of course—"he began again hastily, when a sudden exclamation from his wife cut the palliating sentence short.

"Oh, Tim!" she said, her pale prominent eyes fixed on the slim figure of a girl in a well-cut tweed coat and skirt, who stood at the end of the long pathway whistling to a shaggy white dog. "I feel sure that is Marica Fayne whom I used to know years ago

in London. Poor Charlie Frimley was so in love with her, I remember—he used to tell me about it—but she wouldn't have him. I never could make out why! I should like to see her again, and she might amuse you—men always seemed to find her good company—"

But Tim had turned his head away and his voice was oddly constrained as he interposed quickly:

"I'm sure she wouldn't amuse me in the least, Edith. And don't you think you had much better keep quiet, as the doctor said——"

"Oh, Tim, don't be so tiresome. You know I'm bored to death down here—it will do me good to talk to Marica!"

And as Tim, vanquished, sat with his eyes fixed on the path before him, she leant forward in the bathchair and beckoned to the girl who was now making her way with a supple vitality of motion towards them.

"Oh, Marica!" she cried plaintively, "I haven't seen you anywhere for ages. Come and talk to me!"

"Mrs. Darset!" Marica said with a smile, taking the hand held out towards her.

"No, not Mrs. Darset any longer! You hadn't heard of my marriage—no? I must introduce my husband to you—Lord Windlesham—Miss Fayne."

And then as the young man sitting beside the bathchair raised his head and stood up, Marica saw for the first time that it was Tim, and all the colour ebbed away from the small oval of her face. Mechanically she returned his bow and the next moment she found herself, as in a dream, sitting beside his wife vaguely responding to her disconnected questionings.

".... No, I hadn't heard anything," she heard herself saying, "... I've been away for nearly two years out of England... in the East—Burma, Siam, Japan... no, not alone... with a friend—a friend who was supposed to be dying and is

now quite well her grandmother at Netherbourne died and left her a house and all her money, so we had to come back here for a few months no, not to live, only to settle things and make plans for the future "

"Ah, you're lucky—you won't have to stay here! Isn't Netherbourne too dull for words—not a soul to speak to," wailed Lady Windlesham.

"Do you find it dull?"

"Dull? I'm bored to death—wouldn't you be?" the invalid asked with weak violence.

Would she be? Bored to death with Tim sitting beside her? She closed her eyes and summoned all her presence of mind to frame the words of conventional assent the enquiry demanded, but at that moment Tim bent suddenly forward to pick up the purple-covered book that had slipped off his wife's knees on to the sandy path, and in drawing his shoulders up again contrived to bring one of them sharply in contact with the side of the bath-chair.

"Oh, Tim!" Lady Windlesham cried peevishly, how clumsy you are! Can't you really manage to move without jolting me?"

Marica started abruptly to her feet and held out her hand. "I must be going on. Good-bye."

"But you'll come and see us, Marica? You'll come and cheer me up?" begged Lady Windlesham.

"Thank you very much. Good-bye," she added with a hurried nod to Tim, and calling Balzac she walked quickly away over the dappled shadows of the pathway.

"Marica was not a bit amusing to-day!" Lady Windlesham remarked with a sigh—a remark to which the young man at her side made no reply whatever.

Meanwhile Marica with unseeing eyes made her way out of the gardens and along the grassy cliff by the sea. Was this some strange dream or a grotesque reality? she wondered dully. Tim would marry

some day—she had always steeled herself to face that probability—but not Mrs. Darset, not this dull, prosaic woman who could rate him like a schoolboy and be bored with him sitting by her side. And he had not even winced—for she had not the power to wound him! Marica remembered with a stab of pain the feeling of cosy comfort she had felt with Tim—the sense of well-being, of happy camaraderie that he was able so wonderfully to throw around him. But all this was as nothing to the woman he had made his wife.

With tears stinging in her eyes she walked hurriedly onwards. Tim was hers—hers—once, long ago. They were made for each other—had he not said so? And she had lost him—all for what? What good had his defection brought him? All the pain that she had suffered on her own account, the bitter hours of resentment at his faithlessness were wiped out now in her thought for him, in the flood of pity that overwhelmed her. Tim had hurt her—desperately, irreparably, but ah! how much more deeply he had injured himself! And the fact that he probably did not realise the extent of that injury made its pathos none the less poignant.

In the brief moment she had allowed herself to look into his face she saw that it was not unhappy, only the "glorious morning" look was gone and the dull content of the ordinary unaspiring man had taken its place.

The words of Epictetus suddenly came back to her, charged with a new meaning: "Look to it that thou do nothing like a sheep, for thus hath the man perished!" And she understood that Tim had done this like a sheep—had clung to the Sheep-Track, that path of least resistance—and so the real Tim—the Tim she had once known, who had held her in his arms and cried: "Isn't life splendid, darling?", who had sat beside her, looking up at the blue sky and talked of his hopes and dreams—had ceased to exist.

And she thought of that other man, who had never

changed, had never failed her, who, with the thickness of the world between them had never wavered in his love for her, and as she walked on over the wind-swept grass, with the smell of the sea blowing in her face, she knew that at last the spell was broken that had kept her so long in bondage, and with the sight of Tim as he had become, something inside her heart had given way and set her free.

THE END.